

EXTRACT FROM HANSARD

Federation Chamber, Wednesday 15 May

Ms KING (Ballarat—Minister for Road Safety, Minister for Regional Services and Local Communities and Territories) (16:17): I am very proud as the member for Ballarat and a member of this parliament, which has recognised and apologised on behalf of the Australian people for the shameful policies and practices of forced adoption. I have heard from a number of my constituents who have been affected by these practices. All were moved by the apology and particularly by the very heart-felt words of our Prime Minister.

For many, it provided a time to share their grief in the open without the stigma of the past and to begin a process of healing. Nothing will ever make up for the hurt, betrayal and loss caused by these practices. But, as a nation, this acknowledgment speaks to our common humanity and to our moral obligation. I do not think anything can be more powerful than the words of those mothers, particularly, who have been directly affected. So I would like to take the opportunity here to use most of my contribution to read to the chamber a letter handed to me by one of my constituents, Lyn Kinghorn, who details her own heartbreaking story, a story that is replicated many, many times across this country. I quote from Lyn's letter:

In 1963 I was single, 16 and pregnant. My parents bullied my child's father to stay away. My mother put pressure on me to have an abortion. They were willing to pay £400 for this. I refused and a place was found for me at Berry Street. I was happy to go to Berry Street and continually thought my boyfriend was coming with his Mum to rescue me, only to find out years later—he was threatened with jail if he came near me.

My beautiful daughter was born on 24/12/1963. I took care of her for the week that I was in hospital. I had free access to spend all of my time with her. On 31/12/1963 a nurse was sent from Berry Street to the Women's Hospital to collect me. I begged and screamed for help not to be separated from my daughter. I was told to go home and be a good girl.

When I got back to Berry Street distraught and screaming - the Matron came out and said in a cruel voice "I hope you have learnt your lesson." I certainly did, no way would I ever get into such a situation again.

I married and two members of the family I married into had been single mothers in the decades before me. I believed I had been weak and something was wrong with me that I had been unable to be a Mum like they both had ...

I am shocked and distressed to learn the role the medical profession took to separate me from my child.

Between the mid-1950s to mid-1970s the policy was that the medical profession, in its bid to heal infertility forcibly — removed babies from single Mums. What became of Doctor/patient care and relationship?? The medical profession used me and other Mums like me as a cure for strangers. Why was their need more important than mine?? I have been profoundly injured by this policy that is now known as Forced Adoption. I strongly expose this as ABDUCTION for adoption. My human rights were abused.

I was forced to sign consent 8 days after separation, as I was told I would never see her again and if I refused to sign she would be raised in an orphanage. By this time I had turned 17. I was unable to vote, get a loan or a drivers licence, but without an advocate present - able to sign consent to lose my child.

My first child after I married was stillborn — another daughter. I was heartbroken - but was able to move on from that without the continued trauma of loss the abduction has caused throughout my life.

I am so blessed to have had 4 more children and 4 step-children. My next daughter recently said "Mum, this has consumed your life."

I do wonder how this abduction has directed my life as a wife and mother. Many years spent involved with numerous groups trying to understand and uncover this truth. So hard to believe in Australia, this crime was committed against more than 200,000 Mums and babies. Yet in the previous decades — care and protection was the usual outcome.

I thank you for the opportunity to tell a small part of my experience.

I do not think any of us can imagine the incredible hurt that Mrs Kinghorn must feel but, because of her strength, resilience and determination, and the determination of the many mothers like her not to let this go, we can be here today to have this apology. We can also ensure that we understand what happened, say sorry for what happened, acknowledge all of the people affected and never again preside over policies and practices that will cause such unbearable hurt to families. Whether it is the mothers, the fathers, the children who were taken or their siblings, they all were and continue to be deeply affected by what happened to them.

Hopefully some in later years have, at the very least, had the opportunity to find out what happened and to meet some of their family members. Many simply will just never know. For all of that heartbreak, it is fitting that we offer, as this parliament, the most heartfelt apology. We are sorry.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (16:23): Thank you to the minister for sharing that story. I think it is often the case that, when we are doing things in the parliament, it is the personal stories that people bring in here that can really frame these issues in our

minds, and obviously that story is one of the ones where we can see just how tough these policies were on people and the enormous human toll that they took.

I will not use all of my time but I just want to take the opportunity to add my voice to the national apology for forced adoptions and removals. It is astonishing to find, when we look back, that it is actually not that long ago and how cruel these policies were for the people who were involved. For the parliament to come together, as we did in the last sitting period, and offer an apology on behalf of the people of Australia for what occurred is a very important thing that this parliament has done.

I will confess that, in the past when the parliament has come together to issue some of these apologies, I have sometimes been a bit, I suppose, cynical about the benefits of them.

But when you see the effect they have on people who have been affected by the policies, and the effect that the national apology can have, any of those thoughts are dispelled. I must admit I felt the same way about the national apology that was given by former Prime Minister Rudd on behalf of the country to Aboriginal people in Australia. To see the effect that had on the people and what it meant to them I think would dispel even the most cynical of thoughts about the importance of the national parliament taking these stands and saying on behalf of the nation that we are sorry for some of the things that have happened in our nation's past.

When we are talking about forced adoptions we are really talking about policies which, certainly to our eyes today, seem unimaginably cruel, and the institutionalised nature of the fact. We need to understand that the standards were so different back then. Even though it is not that long ago, the way people were treated was different. If you were a single mother in the 1950s and 1960s social stigma was attached to that. There was inability really to have any power over the situation. If you were a single mother it might be that your family would not want you to have contact with the father, perhaps the father just refused to take any responsibility and there was nothing at the time to ensure fathers would be forced to face up to the consequences of their actions. You could certainly impregnate somebody and then disown your responsibilities, and that happened to a lot of women, unfortunately, during those times. Then the stigma attached to them by society for being single mothers was crushing. A lot of families would not have anything to do with a daughter who found herself in this situation. They had so few options because it was not the case back then, as it is the case today, that you could rely on the social security system for support, for instance. If you were a single mother and you found yourself in these circumstances, your options for how you would support yourself and support your family would be incredibly limited. Obviously, for mothers facing these circumstances it was incredibly difficult.

I join with the parliament and say that I think this is the right motion on behalf of the country. I think it is good that the parliament has come together to apologise for forced adoptions and I add my voice to the parliament's motion. I think it is a very worthy thing for the parliament to have done.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Minister for Road Safety, Minister for Regional Services and Local Communities and Territories) (16:27): What a privilege it was to be in the Great Hall on 21 March when the Prime Minister issued the national apology for people affected by past forced adoptions. To be in that room and to have the privilege of the people nearby to share their experiences with you was incredibly moving. They were so resilient, but you could see that the pain and the sadness affected every single one of them, and that was just people who were able to be there on that day. No doubt the experience of the past adoption practices affected them very deeply.

It was a very long journey indeed for many of these people to make it to Parliament House to hear that apology, which acknowledged the past wrongs and the dreadful hurts which were caused. That we are here today acknowledging this terrible hurt is testament

to the courage, persistence and determination of many but particularly the mothers who fought for so long to have their voices heard. Saying sorry is such a vital first step towards recognising the trauma we caused and beginning the journey of healing.

However, it equates to just hollow words unless there is also swift and tangible action to accompany it. That is why immediately following the apology the Prime Minister announced that the government would fund measures of \$11.5 million over four years. We know that there were approximately 150,000 forced adoptions in Australia. The constant message during the consultations on the forced adoption apology was that unless the apology was backed up with specific practical measures it would be just words. Almost all of the people consulted wanted counselling by appropriately trained staff, with an emphasis on mental health services. They wanted a cost-free, one-stop shop for searches for birth certificates, deaths and marriages and to ensure hospital records were preserved and available to be searched without cost. Another frequent request was for a lasting commemoration.

The government, of course, responded. Our response was: \$5 million for improved access to specialist support services, \$5 million for training and guidelines for mental health professionals and \$1½ million for the National Archives to deliver the Forced Adoptions History Project. The Attorney-General's Department will progress resolution of the issues relating to integrated birth certificates and will investigate the harmonisation of and access to judicial birth, death and marriage registers. The package of measures also includes an immediate investment of funds for the Access to Allied Psychological Services program, where, through their GPs, people who were affected by past forced adoptions will have priority access to a mental health professional.

The package also includes funding to develop guidelines and training for health professionals to increase awareness of forced adoption issues. Awareness of this shameful chapter in Australia's history among the broader population is also paramount. For this reason we will be funding the National Archives of Australia for a public education and awareness exhibition and a website which will allow people affected by past forced adoptions to give voice to their experience.

But we know that people who have lived through the trauma of past forced adoptions need much more than this. They need services to support them to gain access to the information which tells their experience—the information from hospitals, maternity homes and other places where records are held. We also know that people affected by past forced adoptions need peer and professional support to help them with their journey of understanding and healing. We need to design services that strengthen, complement and enhance what is already available to ensure we can meet their needs and expectations. This means making sure that people who have experienced past forced adoptions have a voice in the development of these services. I will soon be announcing a process to ensure we have representation from these people—including mothers, fathers and adult adopted persons—so that their experiences can positively contribute to an improved system.

If we are going to make a lasting impact on people's lives by helping in the process of healing from the terrible injustices which have occurred, we must take the time to get this right. We need to find out what currently exists; where there are strengths, weaknesses and gaps in services; and how a system of support can best meet the needs of people affected by forced adoptions. Through these measures, the government is committed to ensuring that the voices of those affected are heard and continue to be heard, and that those people are supported throughout the difficult process of healing. We are sorry.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (16:32): I start by congratulating the previous speaker for her speech. This is obviously a subject which is very difficult for people, and she gave an excellent speech. On that note, I also congratulate the member for Swan for his speech

in the chamber on this issue. For those people who did not have the privilege of hearing the member for Swan in the chamber when we last sat, which was, I think, seven weeks ago, it was one of the best speeches that has been given in this term of the parliament. I commend that speech to anyone with an interest in this issue. As someone who lived through the reality of this issue, the way that he clearly, concisely and emotionally dealt with the issue was an absolute credit and testament to him. In that regard also I think credit is due to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, who also spoke extremely well on this issue.

Both sides of the parliament came together to recognise this issue and to work in a bipartisan way to make sure that there was a national apology for forced adoptions and removal policies and practices. By making that apology, we were able as a parliament to recognise the errors that occurred. It is absolutely vital for those who have suffered to have the reassurance that the national parliament has recognised that what went on was wrong and that it has been prepared to do the right thing, admit that and make this apology.

The government has also put revenue towards trying to help deal with the situation, and I commend the government for doing that. Obviously that was supported by the coalition, rightly, and hopefully those policies which have been put in place as a result of this national apology can help those people who are still dealing with this issue and in many cases have had to deal with it for most of their lives.

I would like to go back to the member for Swan's speech because, having not lived through this, I think it is difficult to understand what the consequences would be. He talked about being reunited with his brother and the emotion of that and also what his brother and he had had to live through until they were reunited and until, slowly, other members of the family were also reunited. I think it is extremely telling. As someone who grew up as one of six children, I cannot imagine what it would have been like to discover members of your family when you were at the age of 45 or 51, as was the case with the member for Swan.

I commend all members of the House for the national apology, and I commend all those who have made statements on it. I think there have been some very moving speeches from our two leaders and, most importantly, from someone who has lived through this and to whom this meant so much. It is an honour for me to stand here to support this apology and to commend those who have also done so.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers and Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water) (16:37): I am pleased to speak to the motion moved by the Attorney-General in the House of Representatives on Thursday, 21 March, to formally apologise for past practices and policies that forced the separation of mothers from their babies. These policies and practices are a shameful part of our past and resulted in such sadness, pain and suffering for so many mothers, fathers and children as well as brothers, sisters and extended family. I am pleased that the government and the parliament in a bipartisan way is taking responsibility and formally apologising for these practices. I hope that this apology will be a step in the healing process for many Australians who have had their children forcibly removed from them and for the children who grew up not knowing their parents.

When listening to the experiences of mothers who had their children forcibly removed, it struck me that they not only experienced and continue to experience the grief and trauma of losing one's child and not only were denied the fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for their child but they were also treated so badly—being shamed and shunned by our society. One of these mothers is Roslyn Sponheimer. In 1963 Roslyn fell pregnant at the age of 17 and was immediately made to feel shameful.

Her parents and GP mapped out her future, which she had no say in. She was to resign from her work and lie to her friends and family, saying that she was leaving to work in the country. Instead, she was to enter the Kate Cock's Home for Unmarried Mothers in Brighton, Adelaide, under a false name. She was to live there until the baby was born and then return home, leaving her baby behind. When Roslyn reflects back to her time at the home she says that there was no concept of informed consent and it was just accepted that after giving birth mothers were to leave their babies behind. No alternatives were ever discussed. In Roslyn's words:

So there we were. A bunch of society outcasts, brainwashed into submission and suffering feelings of such low esteem and low self worth that I can say it has impacted on every decision I have made in life since.

After a long and difficult birth, Roslyn was able to see her son for five minutes. She recounted that she could still remember every detail of his face as he looked up at her.

After the birth Roslyn was sedated and confined to bed for five days as a result of toxemia. On the seventh day, when she was able to get up and move around, Roslyn recounts:

... the Deaconess called me into the waiting room. She said, 'I have a form for you to sign.' She then asked me if there was any request I had of the adopting parents. All I could think to say was, 'Don't make him learn the piano if he doesn't want to.' She then asked me if I wanted to name the baby. I said I didn't want to remember a name, thinking it would somehow be easier if she named him instead. She said she would name him after her own husband. She then handed the form to me to sign.

After two weeks in hospital, Roslyn was given tablets to dry up her milk and told to go home. Roslyn's family never mentioned the birth of her son, and for a long time Roslyn went along with that silence. She said that it was only when she had her daughter and son later on that she understood what had been stolen from her. Roslyn said:

To survive mentally, I had to put it to the back of my mind. Due to the laws of our land, I couldn't search for my son until he turned eighteen and so I just had to grieve in private. Even my husband didn't seem to have any understanding of what I was going through.

Roslyn attempted to search for her son when he turned 18, but to no avail, as there was not any support to do so. Despite a desperate search she found only dead ends. To add insult to injury, a social worker from the Department of Community Welfare at the time called Roslyn to inform her that there had been a complaint from the Methodist mission which had been responsible for the adoption, and that she had to stop looking for her son.

After 22 years, Roslyn was able to locate her son via a government department and was reunited with him in 1986. Since the reunion, however, Roslyn has attended various counselling sessions but has been unable to completely come to terms with the loss of her baby. Even though her son is now 49, is married and has his own children, it has taken most of the 27 years since her reunion with her son for her to feel that she could

be herself around him. Looking back on what happened to her, Roslyn feels that she was denied the opportunity to express normal feelings of anger, hurt and emotional pain and that she has been left with an aching void which will never be filled.

Unfortunately, Roslyn's story is one of so many mothers around the country who had their babies forcibly removed. Approximately 150,000 to 250,000 babies of unwed and mostly teenage mothers were forcibly removed from the 1950s to the mid-1970s in Australia. These mothers and fathers were betrayed by a system that gave them no choice and subjected them to manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice. These actions deeply damaged not only the mothers, fathers and families but also the children.

The motion before the House also apologises to the children who were adopted or removed who were led to believe that their mothers had rejected them and who were denied the opportunity to grow up with their family and community. These children grew up not knowing how much they were loved, and many still report a constant struggle with their identity, uncertainty and loss and feel a persistent tension between loyalty to one family and a yearning for another. One of these people is Annette from Aldinga in my electorate, who was taken from her unmarried mother in 1954. Born out of wedlock, Annette was a child of the forced adoption policy. Annette finds solace in the fact that her mother hung on to her and refused to sign the forms to release her from her custody for six weeks. Annette says that what happened next has impacted her entire life. After being separated from her mother, Annette was adopted in 1954 by a family that needed more hands on their farm, and she spent her time after school not relaxing or socialising with her peers but performing manual labour for her adoptive family. At the age of five, Annette was given a book titled *The Chosen Baby*, but Annette did not feel lucky for being chosen, as she said she had to deal with the grief of believing that she was not wanted by her biological mother and of having an unhappy childhood with her adoptive family.

As Annette grew older she attempted to conduct research into where she had come from, to heal the pain she had from not belonging. But as if to rub salt into the wounds, Annette was incredibly upset that she was made to pay for any information that you could find in the state records. Everything that happened to Annette as a child still affects her today. But she worries also for her own children, who, because of the lack of a family—they have no uncles, aunts, grandparents or cousins—will not appreciate the role the extended family plays. Because of the forced adoption policies that removed Annette from her mother, her children have been denied the opportunity to have a family network. They lack the support that an extended family provides.

These are just two stories from my electorate, but I know there are many more right around a country. We can never make up for the trauma, pain, loss, disconnection and separation that has been caused by the forced adoption processes, policies and procedures. We have heard from the Prime Minister that the government, and indeed the parliament, is committed to doing what we can to help those affected by forced adoption practices, to help families reconnect and to help adoptees find their families. The government will provide funding towards support services and recognition of the people affected by forced adoption policies and practices. This includes the Allied Psychological Services Program, which will give families high priority in accessing important mental health services, and funding for the National Archives of Australia to undertake a history and recognition process for those affected by forced adoption policies.

The government is also establishing a Past Forced Adoption Practices Implementation Working Group, whose members will represent the mothers and fathers of the children of past forced adoptions. This group will perform a key advisory role to the government on the implementation of services and projects. It will also provide a platform for national consultation and communication between the government, advocacy groups, peak bodies, non-government organisations and service providers in the time leading up to implementation.

We all expect the right to determine our own direction in life, and part of that is enabling us to nurture, care for and love our children. But during this dark period our society has deliberately denied many this opportunity. While we can never fully make up for what has happened to these families in the past, we will make sure that these practices are never repeated. To Roslyn, Annette and all those who have been affected by these practices, we say sorry.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (16:47): I thank the member for Kingston for her moving speech. I know how passionate she is about these issues, and we could see the emotion in her face as she related to us so very well that harrowing story about Roslyn, which we would all concur is a rather tragic tale. I also commend the member for Swan for his 21 March speech to the House of Representatives on this subject. I think you could have heard a pin drop while he was speaking, and that is a rarity in the House of Representatives. The words he expressed and the emotion he showed that day were a lesson for all of us about how important this is, how wrong the practice was and how far we have moved as a society.

Adoption emerged in Australian legislation in the early 20th century. In the early stages it was generally an open process and often involved the adoption of older children, as opposed to infants. After World War II, society changed its perception of adoption, and the idea of the adoption of infants became more acceptable. Adoption was seen as the solution to the societal stigmas of infertility and illegitimacy, and also spared these children from spending their childhood in institutions.

In the 1950s, adoption legislation was amended throughout Australia to remove the openness of earlier legislation and ensure adoptions occurred through a closed process. It was thought at the time that this would help the adoptive parents to ensure that they were seen as, and felt like, the natural parents of their babies. This was referred to as the 'clean break theory', which was developed by Sigmund and Anna Freud. It was seen as the best outcome for both the birth mother and the baby. Furthermore, those who supported this theory believed it was important in ensuring that the bonding between the adoptive mother and the child was not interrupted. Whilst many women willingly placed their babies up for adoption with religious organisations, adoption agencies and through other measures, the sad and shocking reality is that a number of women were forced to place their babies up for adoption usually because they were unmarried. Young women and their families, and indeed society, felt they were not fit to take care of their children.

The Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs released a report in 2012, entitled 'Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices' after an extensive inquiry into former forced adoptions in Australia's history. The report states it was incontrovertible that forced adoption was common, but it was not possible to estimate the number of forced adoptions that had taken place as statistics from the era do not indicate why a child was placed for adoption, nor whether the parent or parents had willingly consented. Previous parliamentary inquiries into past adoption practices have been undertaken by the New South Wales and Tasmanian parliaments. Both parliaments found such practices had caused a considerable amount of pain and suffering, especially for parents who had been pressured to place their child up for adoption. The New South Wales report went as far as to say there had been a number of practices which were unethical and even unlawful.

Forced adoption occurred in Australia for more than 50 years, from 1930 until 1982; however, most of these adoptions took place from the 1950s to the 1970s. Society at that time held different views than those of today. White, married couples with a secure income were seen as the ideal family unit and regarded as the most capable of providing the necessary care for children. On the other hand, having a child out of wedlock and the lack of financial support for single mothers meant there was a widespread view that adopting the babies of these unmarried women was in the best interests of the child.

There are numerous reports of women who were forced to pass their baby up for adoption gaining access to their hospital records later in life to find their file had been automatically stamped 'BFA'—baby for adoption—due to their being an unmarried woman, before they had even given birth or signed any adoption papers. Lina Eve was one woman who discovered her files have been stamped. She said:

My medical records have "BFA" stamped on them...even though I had said from the start I wanted to keep my baby. So its clear to me they had the adoption of my child as their intention all along.

Most mothers were unmarried at the time they gave birth and were sent to maternity homes for all or some of their pregnancy, a decision usually made by their parents. Many did not have pleasant experiences in these homes, having their possessions removed and being prevented from having any outside contact with supporters they had. They were made to work without pay and were subjected to pressures to put their babies up for adoption. Ann Allpike made a submission to the Senate committee stating:

The emphasis was always on adoption being what was 'best for the child'—'if you love your baby then you will give it up for adoption'. ... I was not treated as an expectant mother but rather encouraged to think of my baby as not being mine but belonging to some perfect deserving married couple.

The experience of giving birth was also not pleasant for many women who were considered to be putting their babies up for adoption even if they had not already given consent. Women recall being medicated, strapped to the bed and ignored or abused by medical staff. Jan Kashin stated to the Senate committee:

Certainly by 1963 the practice of hiding the baby from the mother giving birth was well established. The sheet went up on cue. The drugging was mandatory for unmarried women, as was ... the shackling to the labour ward bed.

Babies from unmarried mothers were quickly whisked away, with most never touching and many never seeing their baby. It was remarkably traumatic for a woman who had been shunned by society and quite likely by her family to not be allowed to have contact with the child she had been carrying for nine months—the reason she had been shunned in the first place. Medical staff at the time, and indeed midwives and nurses who submitted evidence to the Senate committee, believed it was kinder to remove the baby from the start than to allow the mother and baby to bond before the baby was removed from the mother at a later date, which would have caused further and, in some people's opinion, 'unnecessary' distress.

Following the birth of their child, these women were left to get on with their lives as if nothing had happened. Many returned home and were treated as if they had been on vacation, but described having a strained relationship with their parents often for the rest of their parents' lives. Others started over somewhere new, holding what they felt was a shameful secret inside. No matter what, all these women got on with their lives still longing for the baby they knew had been wrongfully taken from them.

The effects of forced adoption are immeasurable. This practice affected not only the mothers and babies but also the fathers of these children and the families which these

people have gone on to have later in life. While some women shared their past with husbands, partners and children, others have held onto this secret for a lifetime. Indeed, some women stated to the committee that their submission was the first time they had spoken about their past since the incident had occurred.

For some women the pain of their past was too much to live with and, sadly, they have taken their own lives. How tragic is that! For some, searching for their lost children has consumed their lives. For others, the trauma of what they went through has caused strain on relationships and family dynamics. Some women have lived normal lives but held this pain inside for a long, long time. No two women have dealt with their grief in exactly the same way. In the same way, no two people deal with grief in exactly the same way. No matter what, though, all these women have had to deal with a horrific experience to which they should never have been subjected.

The Senate committee reported that they received a number of submissions regarding how adopted people felt about their adoption. An overwhelming majority described unhappy childhoods—being placed in abusive families and struggling with their self-identity and a need to know who they were. Whilst they were in the minority, submissions were received by the committee from people who held no bitterness towards either their birth mothers or their adoptive families.

I also read a comment from Kristene Wood, a child who was placed into forced adoption, on the Facebook page of my parliamentary colleague the member for Dawson, George Christensen. Ms Wood wrote:

I am a child of forced adoption, and I wouldn't have had it any other way. I was lucky. I have biological brothers and sisters who were not so lucky. And in saying this, I do not take away from them the love that they have for their/our mother but as a result of circumstances they grew up as products of the system, in orphanages, foster homes and the abuse that entailed ... I thank you for the beautiful parents I received, for their love and support throughout my life. Although they are now both dead, I wish that I could have them back every day. I was lucky I was able to thank my biological mum before she too passed away ...

Ms Wood was lucky to be able to meet her biological mother and pass on her eternal gratitude. And I am sure there are many children from this era who would also want to let their mothers know that they have had a good life and are grateful for the life they have lived. This does not excuse the fact that these children were taken away from their mothers, but I hope knowing their child still received a happy and loving upbringing can bring their mothers some comfort.

On 21 March this year, the Prime Minister apologised for the 'policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering'. This apology was issued following one of the recommendations of the Senate committee's report. And, whilst it cannot change the past and it will not take away the anguish and trauma of these events, hopefully this formal recognition can assist in the healing process for all those affected by forced adoptions.

Barbara Maison said in her submission:

We need to be respected in this country's history as mothers who had their babies taken forcibly from them for no other reason than to satisfy the ideals of others. We need to be

respected in this country's history as mothers who were unjustly abused, betrayed and punished by all governments, hospital staff, welfare workers, religious hierarchies and society because of their inhumane, obscene prejudice towards us.

To Ms Maison I say: we do respect you and all the other mothers who went through similar experiences to yours. This apology will help ensure your part in Australia's history is acknowledged and recorded as you would like it to be. May it help to ensure nothing of this nature occurs again.

As the Leader of the Opposition stated:

Whenever adoptions take place, they have to be chosen and they have to be for the right reasons.

People have a right to make choices and they deserve our love and respect whatever choices they make.

Whilst there can be no excuse for forced adoptions in the past, before I finish I would like to note that not all adoptions were carried out under such circumstances. I was contacted by a constituent from a small town in my electorate, who requested I do not use her name so as to ensure her family's privacy is protected. She wished for me to make this point clear. This constituent and her husband adopted children during the 1970s—two children who have grown up knowing about, as she put it, their natural backgrounds. When they approached the adoption agency it was made clear to them that the agency would be looking for parents deemed to be most suitable for the children and not the other way around. They were extensively interviewed, and filled out countless forms, which required answering a number of very personal questions—rightly so, as this ensured children were only going to be placed in loving, caring homes. My constituents were overcome with joy when they found out that they had been successful in gaining approval to be adoptive parents to two children they love and cherish. I am sure these constituents are not alone in wishing to be acknowledged as parents who gave their children a loving home. Not all adoptions which occurred during a certain period of the Australia's history were carried out through unethical measures.

Mr ENTSCHE (Leichhardt—Chief Opposition Whip) (17:00): I was certainly privileged to attend the national apology for forced adoptions in the Great Hall on 21 March in the company of many of those who had undergone a forced adoption experience. It was certainly a very humbling and touching event. I am glad that we, as a parliament, had come together in a truly bipartisan way to support this apology. We saw the same happen with the apology to the stolen generation. I think it is very important that we do reconcile some of these less compassionate periods of our history. At times there was a different thinking. I believe that many of those involved in these particular events genuinely in their own way believed that they were doing the best for both the child and the parent. Clearly, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that this was absolutely not the case, as we have seen in this particular initiative.

As we have seen, as a result of the policy of the day there were literally hundreds of thousands of Australians adopted. In many of these situations the mothers had no meaningful choice and, even worse, were absolutely and totally denied any choice at all in what occurred with their child. We as a society have been left with that legacy—hundreds of thousands of mothers who never knew their children and those same

children were left not knowing who their mothers or fathers were. As opposition leader, Tony Abbott, said in his address, this is a tragedy for them. It is also a tragedy for our nation and we must atone for it.

I hope for those affected by the forced adoptions whether they are the mothers, the fathers or other family members that the apology has helped to provide some level of healing and some level of closure. I do accept, however, that these issues and impacts surrounding forced adoption are complex and for some will never be resolved. For mothers having their babies that they have loved and nurtured, carried for nine months and given birth to taken from them without even a look or a touch would be truly heartbreaking. Surely a cry from the child at this point must echo with them for the rest of their lives. The children, who were often taken so young that they did not know any different, still had to come to terms with the knowledge later in life that they were adopted. Even the most loving stable childhood—and I have to congratulate those adoptive parents who provided this—could not prevent feelings of disconnection for many of those children.

This is an issue that is very close to my heart. I would like to highlight two special people that have their own stories to tell. Rae Whitbourne is a grandmother from my region who featured recently in the *Cairns Post*, the local newspaper, on the day of the national apology. Her story is not unusual amongst forced adoptions but that does not make it any less distressing. Rae fell pregnant at a young age after running a bit wild in country Victoria. She was taken to a Church of England home in Melbourne where there were a number of other girls in a similar condition. As their due date drew near, the girls were transferred to the Queen Victoria Hospital where Rae said that they were treated with near contempt by the staff. There was a stigma around them that they were bad and that they had got into trouble. Rae was just 14. After a dramatic delivery, she gave birth to a son, James. She wanted to hold him, but he was whisked away. 'I could hear him crying and I wanted to go to him, but I wasn't allowed,' she recalled. Rae was very vulnerable and certainly very confused and she did not know how to resist the next day when authorities came and forced her to sign adoption papers, saying it was the best for the boy.

More than two decades later, when her youngest child was 16, Rae eventually told her other children about their older brother. The long journey started in trying to track him down—writing to different organisations, but always coming up against a brick wall. Luckily, her son was also looking for his mother. They eventually reunited and now have a very loving and positive relationship. Rae was fortunate in that she had the opportunity to eventually meet her son. But for others, the failure to connect with their roots is frustrating and very heart-rending.

Peter Gries is a constituent of mine in Cairns. He was born in 1956 to a 16-year-old unmarried mother in a country town. While waiting for her due date, his mother was put into a home for unmarried mothers. In Peter's words: 'My adoptive parents were phoned a couple of days before my mother was due to give birth and were told "The next one's yours." My birth mother was not allowed any contact with me, whatsoever.' He is one who had a very happy childhood with his adoptive family. When, at the age of about five, he asked his parents where he had come from, they celebrated the fact that he was adopted. He said, 'With my adoptive parents I was made to feel very special. They said they had me because they really wanted me'. He recalled: 'I had a brother four years older, who was adopted in the same circumstances. But different people handle things differently. I felt I was very special but my brother had very strong feelings of abandonment.' In later years, Peter did feel a void when it came to his family history. When he went to his local doctor and was asked if he had a history of heart trouble or other genetic diseases he had to answer that he just did not know.

He registered with Jigsaw, the post-adoption support organisation, but found it very limited in the amount of information he could access. Unfortunately, at the time,

information-sharing was only possible if both sides had registered with the organisation. Peter's brother also had no luck in finding his mother. It has certainly had an effect on him and on his experiences as a parent. Peter told me that after receiving no information through Jigsaw or other agencies he had 'hit a brick wall'. He said, 'I tried to put it out of my head and forget about it—but then the apology brought it all back to the surface.'

Recently he contacted my office. He asked: 'Now that the adoption apology has been made, what assistance will be given to those desperate to make contact but who have been met with closed doors? At 57 years of age there cannot be much time to connect with the birth mother I was taken from.' He was desperate for help. Peter would like to see more accessibility for people wanting to find out about their families. 'I wish there were a helpline that could guide me in the right direction—a mediation service or something like that,' he has reflected.

This is a very important point for us to recognise. Given that the apology may have brought these repressed feelings to the surface, I certainly urge this House to make sure that as a society we are providing an appropriate level of support for those affected. This includes not just emotional support but also help to reconnect these families that have been divided for so long.

I understand that this apology is just one step in a long journey to healing, understanding and getting those affected families back in touch with each other. Nevertheless, I have to say that I am very pleased to be able to stand here today offering my very, very strong support for this motion for those in our community who have been affected so adversely and profoundly by these forced adoption practices of the past. Let us learn from this dreadful experience and make sure this type of thing does not happen into our future.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (17:10): It is with a heavy heart that I rise to join the previous speakers to speak on this motion in relation to the national apology on forced adoptions and, on behalf of the people of Gippsland, get our voice to the people affected by the forced adoption policies of the past. In doing so, I do not intend to quote the entire apology, but I think it is worthwhile to quote a couple of the extracts. I quote:

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 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 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.

... ..

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.

As a personal message to the many people in my community who have contacted me in relation to this national apology I simply assure them: 'You did nothing wrong. You had the misfortune of living in a severely judgemental era of our nation's history and you did nothing wrong.'

The background to the national apology on forced adoptions is important. In February last year, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee released its report into those practices, and the report found that the policies and practices that resulted in forced adoptions and the removal of children were widespread throughout Australia, particularly during the mid-twentieth century. The Senate committee inquiry received submissions from hundreds of individuals who had suffered from the effects of forced adoptions and found that there were many different ways in which these forced adoptions occurred. The accounts provided in that report are shocking and graphic for anyone who has read them. They range from experiences of mothers being drugged and physically shackled to beds, to social workers failing to advise mothers of government payments that may have been available to support them to keep their child.

These forced adoption practices impacted a large number of Australians and caused significant ongoing effects for many people, particularly the mothers and also the fathers and the adoptees themselves. The report concluded that it is impossible to know the exact number of people who have been affected by these forced adoption practices but that it does number in the tens of thousands of Australians.

While I accept that an apology, no matter how well framed, how well meant, how well intentioned and how well supported by members of this place, cannot undo suffering that has been experienced by those who have been affected by forced adoptions, I hope that the apology will be accepted in the way that it has been offered by members in this place in the hope that it will provide a significant step in the healing process for the mothers, the fathers, the adoptees and their extended family members who were adversely affected by these practices.

It is a great example of this parliament at work when we have such bipartisan support for an issue of such importance, and I do commend the leaders of our two major parties, the member for Warringah and the member for Lalor, on their speeches in the Great Hall. It was a great occasion, befitting the Great Hall. I will quote the Leader of the Opposition, who said:

But hundreds of thousands of Australians have been adopted, often, because their mothers had no real choice or were denied any choice and that means that there are hundreds of thousands of mothers who hardly knew their children and hundreds of thousands of children who hardly knew their mothers.

He went on to say:

We were hard-hearted and we were judgmental and that's why we should apologise.

We did inflict pain on those we loved and on those we had a responsibility for.

For some, we turned what should been the wonderful experience of new life into something filled with shame.

Instead of love, there was reproach;

Instead of support, rejection;

Instead of celebration, silence;

And instead of justice, there was wrongdoing.

And from the Prime Minister:

Today's historic moment has only been made possible by the bravery of those who came forward to make submissions to the Senate Committee and also of those who couldn't come forward but who nurtured hope silently in their hearts.

Because of your courage, Australia now knows the truth.

I will talk about the courage of one brave woman in my electorate, a woman by the name of Brenda Coughlan, who has been a fearless supporter and campaigner for people who have been affected by the policy of forced adoptions. Brenda has helped to lead the fight for this apology. Her baby was taken from her without her consent when at just 17 she fell pregnant and delivered her baby. Even though she was in a loving relationship with the child's father she was coerced into giving up her child for adoption. In her evidence provided at the Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations held by the Victorian parliament's Family and Community Development Committee, Brenda said:

My body was forcibly examined without consent, not by 1, not by 2 but by up to 12 male medical students at a time — different hands, without consent, brutally and cruelly thrust inside my body one after the other, over and over again; at the same time, strangers' hands cruelly pulling at my breasts, pushing at my stomach, with the excuse given that ... it was just part of medical students' training.

She went on to say:

I was eventually able to train my mind to visualise on an item in the cubicle so that the pain and the trespassing on my body by a group of males could be endured. I was barbarically

and criminally tied down with shackles. I was torturously treated during labour. I was entrapped. I was defenceless. I was petrified and frightened.

I make no apology for the graphic nature of the evidence, because it needs to be told.

The hurt, anger and disillusionment with the medical profession resulting from that treatment obviously lingers with Brenda today. Brenda is not someone who has pursued this case for any material gains—she is not interested in compensation—but she wants to make sure that such atrocities never occur again. She said to me during a recent discussion in my office:

This is not about money, because my daughter was never for sale. Money can never compensate me for the pain and loss my daughter and I have endured.

It is a remarkable tribute to Brenda that in addition to working so hard campaigning for victims of forced adoptions she has found the energy within herself to open her heart to orphans in Asia and has actually organised ongoing practical support for those less-fortunate children.

I must say that Brenda has been through an emotional roller-coaster, and it is fair to say that she was disappointed with some aspects of the national apology. It was an intensely emotional time for all the people involved in this issue. She was disappointed because she was concerned it did not include a specific reference to the mistreatment that I have just highlighted in relation to the medical profession. I wrote to the Attorney-General, Mr Dreyfus, on her behalf to raise her concerns in relation to the failure of the apology to identify that specific reference to the medical profession. I thank the Attorney-General for his most recent reply, which I will put on the record:

Although the national apology did not specifically mention the treatment of mothers in Victorian hospitals, it did acknowledge the manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice that many mothers experienced as a result of forced adoption policies and practices. It also acknowledged that many mothers were denied their rights, given false assurances and forced to endure coercion and the brutality of practices that were often unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal. Not including references to specific situations ensured that the apology included the widest possible range of people affected by forced adoption practices.

The Attorney-General went on to point out that there has been a formal statement of apology from the Victorian government and that Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital and Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital issued apologies on 23 January and 20 March this year for their involvement in forced adoption policies. I think it is important that it is on the record, because, for people like Brenda, the abuse and the violence that she endured will live with her for the rest of her life.

The national apology for forced adoptions is obviously not the end of the story for the people who were hurt by these policies. We cannot, by any stretch, pretend in this place that we can take away the pain or the suffering that they endured and that was inflicted on our fellow countrymen and countrywomen, but we can resolve to ensure that such atrocities are never repeated and to support those broken-hearted souls during the remainder of their lives. I do hope that through this apology, through the extraordinary

support across both sides of politics, we can give some comfort to people like Brenda as they continue their life's journey. I commend the apology to the House.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (17:21): I am very pleased to join all the speakers on this very important motion. Like many contributors to this discussion, I joined Prime Minister Julia Gillard on 21 March this year when she apologised on behalf of the Australian people for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies. As we have heard so much, these policies and practices did create a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering for the mothers, the fathers, the daughters and the sons. As a government, we recognised and acknowledged the profound effects of these policies and practices, and offered the apology in good faith and with very deep humility. I saw firsthand how moved people were to hear the Prime Minister's deeply held and deeply felt words, recognising the wrongs that happened in the past and committing to ensuring they do not happen again in the future.

To redress the shameful mistakes of the past, we are ensuring that all those affected get the help that 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. Following the national apology, we tabled our response to the recommendations of the Senate inquiry and announced \$11½ million in concrete measures and actions the government will be taking to assist those who have been affected. This includes \$5 million so that mental health professionals can better assist in caring for those affected by forced adoption. It includes increased investment in the access to allied psychological services—a program in the Department of Health and Ageing—to make sure that people are connected to mental health professionals. To make sure that the survivors of forced adoptions can receive the support to cope with past pain and hurt, this increased availability to psychological services has already started and people can access this service through their general practitioner.

To support those affected towards healing and recovery, the government have also invested \$5 million to improve access to specialist services and supported records tracing. We will also work closely with state and territory governments to consider how best to invest the government's support to complement and enhance services. It is vital that current and future generations are made aware of this terrible chapter in Australia's history. To address this matter, we have provided \$1½ million for the National Archives of Australia to develop an exhibition and a website to share and raise awareness of the experiences of those affected by forced adoption. That way this chapter in our nation's history will not be marginalised or forgotten again.

We plan to launch the website on the first anniversary of the apology in 2014 and the exhibition on the second anniversary in 2015. The involvement of the people who have been most affected—the mothers, fathers and the now adult children—is critical in informing our approach to these measures. We are establishing a Past Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group to give advice to the government on rolling out these measures and also the other actions in response to the recommendations of the Senate inquiry. The government wants to develop these important support programs and so avenues will be made available for people to have a say about each of them.

Through the national apology we have acknowledged the shameful mistakes of the past and the importance of people speaking out about these past injustices. Through the strength and resolve of those affected, the time of neglect is over and we can now look forward to healing.

Dr STONE (Murray) (17:26): On 21 March 2013 I sat down next to one of the victims of the forced adoption policies in the Great Hall of this parliament. We had a while to wait for the commencement of the ceremony and so we talked about his life, the

sad life that he has had. He has had even more tragedies visited upon him since the initial trauma of his removal from his mother as a newborn. It seems that this incredibly courageous and stoical man, now in his fifties, was one of the many who, perhaps because of diminished responsibility or care, became one of the great many who were subject to medical experimentation, and so he now has serious ongoing health problems.

Michael explained that a series of invasive procedures and the administration of dangerous and, as it turned out, sometimes contaminated drugs left him sterile, stunted and with prostate disease. This he developed when he was still a teenager. He has also had cancer since he was 25. He has suffered, and continues to suffer, a great deal. This very special man, who has given me permission to use his name and pass on his story, has been advocating for proper compensation for himself and his fellow sufferers who were also used as medical guinea pigs in the 1960s and 1970s. More than 200 boys were subject to these treatments, usually prompted by them being short. It was then referred to as 'a failure to thrive'.

Michael O'Meara was born to his then unwed mother in 1961 at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne. His mother wed a few months later. Michael did find and meet his mother in 1989, but tragically she died of cancer shortly after. When his mother was in labour delivering Michael, she was administered LSD as a sedative. This further complicated the birth and affected the baby's kidneys. Michael was recruited into the growth hormone clinic at Prince Henry's Hospital in 1972 when he was just 10 years old. He was subjected to deep sleep therapy in April 1972. At this time he was administered the human growth hormone using products from cadavers. It has since been found that some of this material was contaminated, with a number of young recipients subsequently contracting and dying of the deadly Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, or CJD.

On Monday, 16 June 2008 the Hon. Fran Bailey MP put a private member's motion into the House calling on the government to recognise the 'unapproved' recipients of hormone treatments, including the young men and boys like Michael, who received the human growth hormone treatments between the 1960s and the mid 1980s. The motion acknowledged that the report commissioned in 1993, known as the Allars inquiry, found that approved female patients receiving the same treatment, but for infertility, suffered similar negative effects and as a result of that report received compensation from the Commonwealth. Finally, Ms Bailey's motion called for the compensation of the male victims, both 'approved' and 'unofficial', who received the same hormone treatment but usually for growth stimulation purposes.

During the decades of this extraordinary period of medical experimentation on vulnerable young people, some were officially recognised and therefore were designated as 'approved' recipients of the drugs and procedures. Others, however, and that would seem hundreds, were not officially approved victims who received, however, the same treatment by medical practitioners. These unapproved recipients now have great difficulty obtaining their medical records or proper regard for their plight and their need for compensation. The disease CJD, one of the deadly consequences of experimentation with the human growth hormones, has a long incubation period which may extend for years. When it manifests itself, the dementia progresses rapidly until the patient dies a terrible death. It is one of the most terrible of human diseases. There is no easy test other than a brain biopsy that can confirm CJD.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 17:30 to 17:57

Dr STONE (Murray) (17:57): There is no easy test other than a brain biopsy that can confirm CJD, so these young boys—now men in their 40s and 50s—live with a time bomb, suffering this uncertainty at the same time that they suffer from the other health

impacts of the treatments they received years before. In Michael's case he must spend many dollars each month buying medication that treats his conditions. Surely it is time that these injustices are recognised.

The 800-page report of the Allars inquiry made a very clear case for compensation for victims. I refer to the remarks of Dr Mal Washer MP, who participated in the 2008 debate on the Fran Bailey private member's motion. He highlighted how the Allars inquiry had identified

... failures in the production of product, including the collection of pituitary glands; failures in supervision of the product and programs by government agencies, including the health department, the National Biological Standards Laboratory and the Human Pituitary Advisory Committee, or HPAC; and failures of appropriate action undertaken by the department following suspension of the program in 1985. There were inadequacies in tracing the recipients, the information provided, the epidemiological studies, and blood and organ donation.

Successive governments have failed to take up the cause, although Fran Bailey's motion received bipartisan support at the time.

It is Michael's view that his status as an adopted child born of an unwed mother made him more vulnerable to this careless use of his young body.

As well as being treated with human growth hormone, an unknown number of pre-pubertal and adolescent boys who were short were treated with synthetic androgens or steroids to accelerate their growth after being primed with human growth hormones. This causes prostate disease for some and sterilised an unknown number of these boys. Many of these boys fell into the 'unapproved' category of patients, given that they were treated by medical practitioners who did not officially record all the details of the children they treated.

I was deeply moved by the story told to me by Michael O'Meara in the Great Hall on the day of the formal apology for survivors of governments' forced adoption policies in our country. I am in awe of Michael's dignity and patience as he strives to bring justice for himself and his fellow victims. No doubt Michael will continue to suffer as no human should because our nation failed in its duty of care in regard to his wellbeing. Sadly for Michael, he did not only suffer the ultimate tragedy of separation at birth from the woman who was his mother and who undoubtedly would have loved him. She was drugged and she could not ever know the struggles of her newborn just to draw his first breath. But her baby went on to suffer as a child and then as a man because governments failed to do the right thing by him. I call on the government to revisit the Allars inquiry and offer the same support and compensation as that which was offered and gratefully accepted by the women who were treated at the same time. Obviously Michael's story is just one of the many human tragedies that make up the thousands of stories that deal with the forced adoptions that took place in Australia over many decades in the 20th century.

I think the official apology we gave was long overdue. It was magnificent in the way that it was addressed, I believe, in the appropriate ceremony and with very carefully chosen words from both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott. I stand by that apology, as I think most Australians would. Let us hope that that episode in our history is never repeated in any form and that we never again treat some

children as less valuable or their mothers as having less value simply because of their marital status. I very much commend this motion to the House.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (18:01): I rise to speak on the national apology for forced adoptions. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition both spoke on 21 March this year in relation to forced adoptions and removal policies and practices, and the member for Swan gave us a very personal insight into these practices. Today I join our nation in apologising, and in so doing I would like to put on record the story of my friend Sue, who did not find out that she was adopted until much later in life after both her adoptive parents had passed away. As I speak today I will use the words 'birth mother' and 'mother' because those are the words that Sue uses.

Shortly after Sue's mother passed away her brother told her that she was adopted. Hearing those words irrevocably changed Sue's life and she began questioning who she really was. Everything that she had known about her biological identity or thought she had known was now changed. It was different and it was false. Sue embarked on the task of finding out who her birth mother and father were—a long and arduous process that took many years. Eventually she did meet her birth mother but her father had passed away, so she did not meet him. She has also met one of her brothers and a cousin. She still knows very little about the circumstances of her birth but she does know that her birth mother was an Ipswich teenager who was sent to a home for single pregnant women in Brisbane, where she gave birth to Sue. Sue's birth mother signed the papers for her adoption and they were not to meet again for about 40 years.

In the time I have known Sue the circumstances of her birth and adoption have weighed heavily on her mind and I am not sure that she will ever be totally at peace. In her words, she carries the shame of her adoptive parents in not talking to her and telling her that she was adopted. When I have asked her what she meant by that, she said that she never had the opportunity to ask her parents why they adopted her, whether they were not able to have children. But she does know that they hid her adoption from her and she does not fully understand why.

After finding out that she was adopted Sue spoke to an aunt, as it turned out that most of the family knew that she was adopted. The aunt said that Sue's mother just turned up one day with a baby. When the aunt asked whose baby it was, Sue's mother said, 'Mine.' When the aunt asked Sue's father when he would tell Sue that she was adopted, her father replied, 'Never, she'll never know.'

Sue talks about the adoption triangle of the birth parent, the adoptive parent and the adoptive child. She makes the point that it is not just the pain of the relinquishing parent that needs to be acknowledged; it is also the pain of the adoptive child and adoptive parent. Sue has pushed the issues of her adoption to the side. But, again, in her words, 'There is a little scar in her heart.' Her wish is that her adoptive parents were still alive so that she could hug them and tell them that she loved them. To Sue, and everyone else affected by forced adoption, I say: sorry.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (18:05): I rise today to speak about a time in our nation's history that cannot be simply forgotten. Forced adoption policies and practices were widespread throughout Australia during the 1950s and on to the early 1970s. The practice of forced adoption affected many members of society. It was not restricted to a particular class, race, region or area. This was a time when many women were made to relinquish their children, a step that went against every instinct within them, breaking one of the most precious bonds that we have, that between parent and child. This was a time of deep distress and confusion for many young women.

I stand here today saddened, particularly for those men and women whose lives were marked by this practice and the impact that it had not only on them but, particularly, on their children. For many, the grief has impacted their lives to this day. We know the role played by a mother and a father is invaluable, often setting the platform and foundation for a child's future. More important, it allows a child to understand where they come from, who their mother and father are. Many who have been impacted by forced adoption have questioned whether they were loved, whether they were wanted.

A nation now understands the ripple effect of policies which did not put the needs of children first. The experience of every mother and child who endured this heartbreak was unique and very personal. We have heard some of those stories in this chamber today. All of us were touched and impacted to the depths of our being when we heard the stories, particularly throughout the Senate inquiry. We heard from mothers who were stigmatised and disempowered. Many mothers were shunned by the very people who should have been protecting and supporting them. I am sure the secrecy, the shame and the confusion was overwhelming for many at times. Of course we also heard the stories of children who, after years of struggling, asked the question, 'Why?' We heard about their questions of identity and their struggle to accept themselves and their past.

In my own electorate of Macquarie there are quite a few brave people who have been touched by this issue. I would like to relate the story of one such man, a man by the name of Erik Spinney. Many of us know him. He is better known by his tribal name of Standing Bear. Erik was adopted as a baby through the forced adoption practices and he gave evidence at the Senate inquiry as well as writing several submissions. I have met Erik many times and have spent some time talking with him, not only in my office but over coffee. Last year I was touched by his own story. I was touched by his determination to reach out to others who have had the same experience. He spoke about the resulting emotional, physical and psychological effects for those who were part of forced adoption. Erik speaks weekly with people who have gone through the same experience. He mentioned to me that he has been in the position where he has had to talk down several people, mothers of adopted children and adoptees, from committing serious self-harm. While living in Canada for a few years Erik became ill but was unable to access his family medical history. This added complications to his treatment. These are just some of the ramifications for those men and women who were impacted by forced adoption. Erik's message to me was that we must ensure people do not fall through the cracks. We must ensure that every story counts. It is pleasing that one of the recommendations of the inquiry was that an exhibition be commissioned documenting the experiences of those affected by former forced-adoption practices and policies.

The Australian government is funding the National Archives of Australia, over three years, to deliver a forced-adoptions experience history project. We all know that the national apology to those involved in forced-adoption practices is only a beginning of the healing process. We need to be diligent to ensure that the proper support services are available to the thousands of men and women in our electorates across this nation who have been affected by former forced-adoption policies. They need to continue to be given a voice.

I echo the sentiments of the Leader of the Opposition in honouring those who have borne the hurt of the mistakes of this era. I wish to honour the parents who have always loved their children. I want to honour the parents—including the fathers—who have always loved their children and were so hurt by the decisions taken out of their own hands and made for them. It is important also to mention those adoptive parents who have tried to do the right thing by the children who were placed in their care.

It is also important to honour and acknowledge all the children who have tried, in their own ways, to find their own place in a less-than-perfect world. That has, particularly at

the instance of their birth, let them down. I congratulate and acknowledge their bravery and courage, and hope that their journey of healing does move closer towards wholeness.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (18:11): I rise to add my comments to the national apology on forced adoptions. I commend both our Prime Minister and our opposition leader for their very wise and thoughtful words on that day. I will quote a few paragraphs from the Prime Minister's speech. She said:

We deplore the shameful practices that denied you, the mothers, your fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for your children.

... ..

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.

... ..

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 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 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.

Finally, the Prime Minister said:

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.

Never to be repeated. But the root cause of those problems and past mistakes was an over-reaching state, well-meaning bureaucrats engaged in social engineering, who struck at the most primal and sacred bond there is—that between a mother and her child—and the bullying arrogance of meddling bureaucrats who believed that they knew best.

While we say the words 'This should never be repeated', I would like to use this opportunity to highlight two situations in our society where those mistakes of the past are being repeated. The first is in our child protection agency. Currently, we have over 39,000 children who are in the care of the state. In Australia today we have more children who have been removed from their parents than we have people in prisons. This has developed into a \$3 billion industry.

Currently there is a child protection inquiry in Queensland, conducted by Commissioner Tim Carmody. I think some of his comments are very enlightening. Commissioner Carmody has accused some child protection officers of 'over-reacting', by taking children away from parents instead of giving families the help that they need. Commissioner Carmody said:

There are some children in very dysfunctional homes but the answer is not to just take them out. Removing a child at any age from a loved environment—even if it is inadequate or even risky—can give long term problems to that child. The impact on some children will be the same as the stolen generation.

Commissioner Carmody went on to criticise an 'over-reaction' in reporting cases of neglect and abuse and said that our child protection system should not be about 'social engineering' or supposedly 'giving them a better chance in life'. He said the 'system is over-responding to over-estimated risks' and said that children must be removed if there is a danger at the home, but he criticised removal on so-called 'emotional abuse'.

Commissioner Carmody noted that in Queensland today 70 per cent of children removed from their homes are removed due to so-called neglect or emotional harm. He said that the definition of 'emotional harm' was subjective and that there is not even consensus among child welfare professionals. Commissioner Carmody concluded:

If the answer is taking that child away from a loved parent, even if it's a violent home, and putting them with someone they don't know in someone else's home, how is that the right answer?

We seem to have lost the point of the emotional harm that is caused to a child who is removed from their family—from their mother or from their father. Child protection agencies seem not to consider the emotional harm that is done to a child who is taken from his or her parents.

I have had many cases of parents coming to my office and telling me stories of child protection officers chasing children like common criminals through the street, catching them and locking them up as though it was something from a Starsky and Hutch movie. I have heard stories about child protection officers telling children that their parents had abused them, alienating the child from their parents. We need to take a close look at this. Our children are most special and they must be protected. But if we today have more children being taken from their families than we have people in prisons I say that we have something drastically wrong and we need to look at it.

The second area is in our family courts. I know the family courts sometimes need the wisdom of Solomon to work out how to handle disputes between parents. But many cases have come to me in my office from both mothers and fathers, and I think that our family courts are failing badly and that we are making those same mistakes that our Prime Minister said should not be repeated. I would like to make a little comparison. There is a strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law where, if a female alleges that she is

raped, when she goes before the courts she must produce four male eyewitnesses. Of course, when going to the courts and making the allegation of rape they are in fact making a statement that they have engaged in a sexual act. Unless that person is able to provide the four adult male witnesses, the case is reversed on them. They are shown to have made it up, to have fabricated it. And then, because they have made an admission of sexual intercourse, they face being charged with adultery if they are married or with fornication if they are not married, which in itself carries the punishment of death by stoning.

We nod our heads and say what a travesty of justice such a situation is. According to the National Commission on the Status of Women, an estimated 80 per cent of women currently in jail in Pakistan are there because they failed to prove rape charges and were consequently convicted of adultery. We say that is wrong but we have a similar situation occurring today in our family courts.

What is happening in our family courts is if a parent makes an allegation that their child has been the victim of abuse, and that can be either a mother or a father—it is not about mothers' rights or fathers' rights but about the rights of children—when they go before our family law courts the bar is so high it is impossible to prove. So we are seeing a similar situation to what we see under Islamic sharia law, where the burden of proof on the parent who the child has made the allegation against is reversed, and the courts find that the child has been coached to say those things. Without the evidence, the parent that has through good intentions been concerned about the child being abused and often sexually abused finds the courts are turning against them and they are having their child taken from them. This is not an isolated incident. I have many cases. I have spoken to Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs, who brought this to my attention.

We do have a serious problem with the way our laws are being interpreted in the family courts. It is something we need to have a close look at because we do not want to be here in this parliament in 10 or 20 years time making the same apology after seeing the hardship and suffering that has been inflicted upon many parents of children in our society. We do not want to be making that same apology again. We must learn from our mistakes in the past and ensure that we honour the Prime Minister's words—that we resolve as a nation to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated—and make sure they come true.

Debate adjourned.