

2014/04: Should Australia relax its regulations for adoption both within Australia and from overseas?

What they said...

'Adoption is a trauma that happens to a child'

Karl Stenske, author of 'The Hidden Life of an Adopted Child: Understanding the Impact of Adoption'

'Once you leave our shores and you see how many amazing kids there are needing a home, it's hard to imagine why we don't put more resources into helping families connect'

Diane Harapin, a member of the National Adoption Awareness Week Committee

The issue at a glance

On March 4, 2014, the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Abbott, announced changes to procedures and regulations which will allow full adoptions from Taiwan, South Korea and Ethiopia to be recognised automatically in Australia. Amendments to the Family Law (Bilateral Arrangements -- Intercountry Adoption) Regulations will lift restrictions and make it easier for Australians to adopt from these countries.

In 2012/13, 40 per cent of Australia's intercountry adoptions were from Taiwan and South Korea. Currently, after a couple has completed the adoption process in the child's home country, there can sometimes be lengthy court processes at the Australian end. A 12-month wait is typical.

The Ethiopia program, through which Australian couples have adopted more than 600 children, was closed in June 2012. The change will benefit those who have not finalised their Ethiopian adoption.

The changes come after Mr Abbott teamed with adoption activist Deborra-Lee Furness and her husband Hugh Jackman to make it easier to adopt children locally and abroad within a year.

Though the federal government has yet to state a position on adoptions within Australia, adoption campaigners have also lobbied for a streamlined adoption process for the 18,000 children in Australia's care system. Campaigners argue that adoption should be made available to foster parents after a waiting period of approximately six months.

However, opponents have argued that too great a relaxation of the adoption process would not be in the interests of adopted children.

Background

(The information below is an abbreviation of that contained in the Wikipedia entry titled 'Adoption in Australia'. The full text of this entry can be accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoption_in_Australia)

Australia classifies adoptions as known child adoptions (adoption by relatives, stepparents or carers), local adoptions (placement within the country), and intercountry adoptions (adoption of children born overseas).

Adoptions in Australia are handled by state and territorial government agencies or an approved adoption agency. It is unlawful to arrange a private adoption, though foreign adoptions are recognised. Government agencies include Adoption Services in Queensland, Families SA in South Australia and the Department of Human Services in Victoria. When an adoption is completed, the birth parents (also referred to as natural parents) no longer have any legal rights over the child. The adopted child becomes a full member of the adopting family, taking their surname and assuming the same rights and privileges as a birth child, including the right of inheritance. A new birth certificate is issued, in the case of local adoptions. The adopted child also has the same position as a birth child in relation to the extended family of the adopting parents, for example with laws prohibiting incestuous sexual relationships or prohibiting marriages.

Known child adoptions

Family law in Australia with regards to children is based on what is considered to be in the best interest of the child. Family laws contain a strong preference for retaining ties to biological parents, and a general presumption against making a known adoption order because an adoption order severs the legal relationship between the child and one of the child's birth parents. Due to the serious consequences of an adoption order, all stepparent adoption laws contain a strong preference for dealing with new parenting arrangements through a parenting order rather than an adoption order. Stepparents and other carers may apply to the Family Court of Australia for a parenting order, as 'other people significant to the care, welfare and development' of the child. It provides an important 'status quo' if the birth mother were to die, so, for example, other family members could not come and take the child.

Same-sex couple adoptions

Adoption for same-sex couples is currently available in Australian Capital Territory (since 2004), New South Wales (since 2010), Western Australia (since 2002), and to a limited extent in Tasmania (since 2013). In Queensland, Northern Territory, Victoria and South Australia, same-sex couples cannot adopt a child, but can become foster carers. South Australia is considered legislation to allow same-sex couples to adoption after elections won by the Labor party, which promised to 'review' the adoption legislation. The Queensland, Victoria and Northern Territory governments have no plans to review or change the law, to allow same sex couples to adopt.

Western Australia became the first Australian state to allow same-sex adoptions when its Labor government passed the Acts Amendment (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform) Act, 2002 which amended the Adoption Act, 1994 (WA). This allowed same-sex couples to adopt in accordance with criteria that assess the suitability of couples and individuals to be parents, regardless of sexual orientation.

Australia's first legal gay adoption, by two men, occurred in Western Australia in June 2007. Subsequently, on 2 August 2007, the federal government under Prime Minister John Howard announced it would legislate to stop same-sex couples adopting a child from overseas, and would further not recognise adopted children of same-sex couples. The federal Coalition's proposed Family Law (Same Sex Adoption) Bill would amend the 1975 Family Law Act and override state and territory laws that currently cover international adoptions. The bill was due to be introduced in the spring 2007 session of parliament, but has been taken off the agenda following the 2007 federal election.

Single parent adoptions

All States and Territories, except in South Australia and Queensland, permit single people to adopt, including an individual applicant who is in a committed same-sex relationship.

However, individuals seeking to adopt are considered less of a priority than couples and lengthy waiting lists for adoption make it virtually impossible. Individuals may usually only adopt a child with special needs or in cases of exceptional circumstances.

Intercountry adoption

Intercountry adoption in Australia first began in 1975 towards the end of the Vietnam War when 292 Vietnamese orphans were brought to Australia in an American organised evacuation from Vietnam of Asian-American orphans, called 'Operation Babylift'. An average of 330 intercountry adoptions were finalised each year for the ten years between 1998 and 2008. The rate of children being adopted from China has increased faster than any other country from 0.3% in 1999/2000 to 30.9% in 2006/07. In 2007/2008, there were only 270 children adopted from other countries by Australian parents, the majority of the children coming from, in descending order, China (63 children, 23.3%), South Korea (47 children, 17.4%), Philippines (41 children, 15.2%) and Ethiopia (35 children, 13.0%). By 2011/12, the number of intercountry adoptions had dropped to 149 and 129 in 2012/13.

The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department has primary responsibility for developing and maintaining intercountry adoption arrangements with other countries. This responsibility is shared with the State and Territory authorities, which assess applications, facilitate adoptions, provide advice and assistance, and provide post-placement support and supervision. Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements set by the Australian State or Territory in which the application is being lodged, as well as the eligibility criteria of the overseas country of the adoptive child. Intercountry adoption can be a lengthy process, usually taking at least two years in Australia, requiring multiple assessments of the continued suitability of prospective parents.

Intercountry adoption practices are in accordance with the principles of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, which came into force in Australia on 1 December 1998. As at August 2009, Australia had open adoption programs with Bolivia, Chile, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Lithuania, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand. Most of the countries with which Australia has direct adoption programs are also parties to The Hague Adoption Convention, the exceptions being Hong Kong, Ethiopia and Taiwan. Countries with which adoption programs have closed include Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico and Romania. In 2012, Australia closed the adoption program with Ethiopia. It did so at a time when no Ethiopian children would be disadvantaged as no Ethiopian children were available for adoption by Australian parents.

Decline in adoptions

There has been a substantial decline in the number of adoptions in Australia since the early 1970s. In 1971/72 there were 9,798 adoptions, which declined to 1,052 in 1991/92, and 576 in 2005/06. In 2012/13, there was a total of 339 children adopted nationally, arranged through the eight administrations.

A report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics attributes this decline to the introduction of welfare for single mothers, increased legal access to termination of pregnancy, family planning services, access to child care and improved participation of women in the workforce. Forced adoption of tens of thousands of Aboriginals and the children of single mothers continued until the early 1980s.

Low rates of local adoptions are attributed to the low number of children who need placement. Low rates of international adoptions are attributed to long wait times (from two to as much as eight years) and high cost (up to \$40,000).

Internet information

On March 5, 2014, ABC News televised a report in which adoption advocates argued that the new provisions easing intercountry adoptions do not go far enough.

The full telecast can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-03-05/inter-country-adoption-still-not-easy-enough-say/5299306>

On March 4, 2014, ABC News ran a report titled 'Federal Government to introduce changes to regulations for overseas adoptions'

The full text of this report can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-03-04/federal-government-to-make->

[overseas-adoptions-easier/5296528](#)

On January 25, 2014, The Sydney Morning Herald ran a report titled 'Evidence of trafficking of Indian children for illegal adoption emerges'. The article presents recent evidence that children are being sold for adoption in India.

The full text of this article can be found at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/evidence-of-trafficking-of-indian-children-for-illegal-adoption-emerges-20140124-31e84.html>

On January 10, 2014, The Canberra Times published a background report on declining numbers of adoptions in the Australian Capital Territory.

The full text of this article can be found at <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/foreign-adoptions-hit-an-alltime-low-for-canberra-couples-20140109-30kmh.html>

On December 24, 2013, The Brisbane Times published an opinion piece by Ian Robinson titled 'Overseas adoption: the case against'. The piece highlights some of the dangers of overseas adoption and argues against any liberalisation of the regulations surrounding it.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/comment/overseas-adoption-the-case-against-20131223-2zua3.html>

On December 19, 2013, ABC News ran a report titled 'Tony Abbott announces new measures to simplify adoption within a year'.

The full text of this report can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-19/tony-abbott-vows-measures-easier-adoption/5167098>

On November 10, 2013, The Sydney Morning Herald ran a news report titled 'Deborra-Lee Furness lashes out at Australia's adoption record'.

The report details Ms Furness's dissatisfaction with current adoption procedures and her lobbying campaigning to have these provisions changed.

The full text of this report can be accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/deborraleefurness-lashes-out-at-australias-adoption-record-20131109-2x8iy.html>

On December 12, 2012, Mamamia published a comment by Tina Traster titled 'Admitting something is wrong with your adopted child'. The comment examines some of the unexpected difficulties that can confront adoptive parents dealing with a child with some form of attachment trauma.

The full text of this article can be found at <http://www.mamamia.com.au/social/admitting-something-is-wrong-with-your-adopted-child/>

On November 13, 2012, Adoption Voices Magazine ran an article titled 'Adoptee View: What Can a Tiny Baby Know? The Psychology of Adoption Trauma and the Primal Wound'

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://adoptionvoicesmagazine.com/adoptee-view/adoptee-view-what-can-a-tiny-baby-know/#.Uy7QIlVjEy5>

On September 12, 2012, SBS ran a report titled 'End of the line for Ethiopian adoptions' treating the changes made to the regulations surrounding Australian adoptions from Ethiopia.

The full text of this report can be accessed at <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2012/09/21/end-line-ethiopian-adoptions>

On August 18, 2012, Right Now, Human Rights in Australia, published an article outlining the risks associated with overseas adoption. The article is titled 'Intercountry Adoption and Children's Rights'.

The full text of this article can be accessed at <http://rightnow.org.au/topics/children-and-youth/intercountry-adoption-and-childrens-rights/>

On June 28, 2011, The Australian Woman's Weekly ran an opinion piece titled 'What's wrong with adoption in Australia?' detailing what were claimed to be the shortcomings of the then current procedures.

The full text of this article can be accessed at <http://www.aww.com.au/news-features/news-stories/2011/6/whats-wrong-with-adoption-in-australia/>

In July 2006 the Centre for Parenting & Research, Research, and Funding & Business Analysis Division produced a report for the New South Wales Department of Community Service titled 'The importance of attachment in the lives of foster children'

The report details the need for secure attachment in childhood and details some of the difficulties that are likely to occur if this is not provided.

The full text of this report can be accessed at http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/research_attachment.pdf

Help Guide Org. has published material on dealing with 'Attachment & Reactive Attachment Disorders'. The full text of this article can be accessed at http://www.helpguide.org/mental/parenting_bonding_reactive_attachment_disorder.htm

Arguments against Australia relaxing its regulations for foreign and local adoption

1. Removing a child from its parents can have undesirable emotional and psychological consequences

It has also been claimed that whether the adoption is within Australia or intercountry, adopted children often suffer psychological damage possibly due to the loss of their birth family or unsuccessful integration into their adoptive family. It has been claimed that adoptees are over-represented in psychiatric institutions, divorce courts and jails and that these markers of emotional or psychological disadvantage or maladjustment are even higher among intercountry adoptees.

Recent research into the psychological consequences of adoption has suggested that the relinquishment or separation of a child from his/her birth mother is often a traumatic event that deeply impacts the adoptee, potentially throughout life.

Children separated from their birth mothers or their birth family may develop attachment disorder. Helpguide.org, a mental health help site, has described attachment disorders. 'Children with attachment disorders or other attachment problems have difficulty connecting to others and managing their own emotions. This results in a lack of trust and self-worth, a fear of getting close to anyone, anger, and a need to be in control. A child with an attachment disorder feels unsafe and alone.'

Karl Stenske, author of *The Hidden Life of an Adopted Child: Understanding the Impact of Adoption*, has written, 'Adoption is a trauma that happens to a child. The child is torn away from her biological mother, placed in the arms of strangers and is left with questions, doubts, fears and anxiety with no way to verbalize, express, mourn or contextualize those feelings. Though the common misconception is that a child won't remember any of it, many psychologists believe... that children remember their birth and the following events, including relinquishment and adoption, up to the age of three.'

Ian Robinson, a Melbourne freelance writer who is married to an adoptee, has stated, 'People who care about the best interests of mothers and children have long believed adoption should be discarded as a compassionate choice, except in a handful of extreme cases.'

2. Removing a child from its birth culture can have undesirable effects

It has been argued that taking a child from its birth culture can create a sense of cultural disconnection for that child and an enduring sense of cultural alienation.

Opponents of intercountry adoption, with reservations about adoption generally, argue that a potential loss of birth culture is a significant disadvantage of adoption.

UNICEF's *A World Fit for Children Report* states that countries should "promote the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural development of children as a matter of national and global priority." This requires that cultural factors be considered. The *Bringing them Home* report on the Stolen Generation in Australia identified the difficulty children experience when their cultural links are severed, coupled with the difficulty children experience acquiring cultural knowledge and connections in later years. The importance of cultural factors is claimed to apply equally to intercountry and within birth country adoption, as evidenced by the cultural dislocation suffered by Australian indigenous children taken from their birth culture. Cultural factors must, it is argued, be taken into account in determining the best interests of a child.

This point has been made by Ian Robinson, a Melbourne freelance writer married to an adoptee, who has stated, 'Inter-country adoption creates a class of people who do not feel entirely comfortable in their adoptive country but have, at the same time, been alienated from the culture of their country of birth.'

3. Making foreign adoption easier can foster kidnapping and child trading

It has been claimed that making intercountry adoption easier will result in unscrupulous people exploiting the desire of childless Australians and acquiring children via improper and often illegal means.

Ian Robinson, a Melbourne freelance writer who is married to an adoptee, has stated, 'The appearance of rich foreigners in Third World countries looking for "orphans" to adopt is an open invitation to unscrupulous criminals to supply their needs.'

Mr Robinson has further stated, 'Child trafficking is endemic in many of the countries adopted children come from and the governments of these countries are often too poor, too disorganised and too corrupt to establish adequate mechanisms to guard against it.'

Critics claim that even under restrictive regulations it is difficult to guarantee that all overseas adoptions are legitimate. David Smolin, a law professor from Birmingham, Alabama, who adopted two children from an orphanage in India, has stated that despite taking every precaution to ensure the legality of the adoption, he later found out that his two children had been literally stolen from their mother.

Australia currently has protocols intended to help safeguard against trafficking. The document states, 'There are inherent risks in intercountry adoption. Whilst the Australian Government uses its best endeavours to ensure Australia's programs only operate in compliance with Hague Convention principles, prospective adoptive families would be aware of the risks that are nevertheless involved.'

Where concerns about child trafficking in an adoption do arise, it is recognised that this may leave parties feeling vulnerable and uncertain, particularly given that the adoptive family has undertaken the adoption in good faith and in

compliance with all Australian requirements.'

Given that trafficking may still occur under current provisions, opponents of liberalisation argue that any relaxation of these provisions would be unwise.

4. Making foreign adoption easier can allow unsuitable or ill-prepared people to adopt

It has been claimed that it requires a particularly appropriate parent or parents to successfully adopt a child as the relationship often involves additional difficulties to those faced by birth parents. It has further been argued that in the best interests of the child, authorities overseeing adoptions must ensure that only the most suitable candidates are accepted as adoptive parents.

American adoptive mother, Tina Traster, has written and lectured extensively about the extra-ordinary emotional demands made by her adopted daughter and the difficulties that she had in successfully meeting them.

Traster is a highly educated, highly motivated adoptive mother, yet, she acknowledges, 'Sometimes the road to loving your adopted daughter is long and twisted and scary. You know something is wrong-but is it her? Is it you? You drown in shame and confusion, hiding your feelings from the world. It can't possibly be that you've gone to the other end of the world to get this baby and you're not bonded after a month, six months, two years.'

Critics of relaxing inter-country adoption laws argue that the qualities required to successfully adopt a children from another country are not possessed by all prospective adoptive parents and that making it easier for such adoptions to occur would put needy children in the hands of unsuitable carers. Similar claims have been made about the qualities needed to successfully adopt any child.

5. There are ways other than adoption to assist children living in dire circumstances

It has been claimed that if Australia were to increase its foreign aid or if individual Australian citizens were to donate more generously to aid organisations seeking to assist those living in under-developed countries that this would be a better way of ensuring the wellbeing of children living in those countries.

Ian Robinson, a Melbourne freelance writer who is married to an adoptee, has stated, 'If people are serious about helping poor children in Third World countries, they can join one of the many support plans that are a fraction of the cost of adoption.'

International aid agency focusing on sponsoring children overseas stress that such sponsorship can help the entire community from which the child comes.

In 2007, John Stover examined the burgeoning number of children who had lost one or more parents to AIDS. He estimated the amount of support needed by year to keep an orphaned child. The typical costs per child are US\$480 for children aged 0-4, US\$690 for children 5-9 and US\$830 for children 10-17. These cost average about two dollars a day. Aid organisations note that such a donation amounts to less than the cost of a cup of coffee.

There are even organisations encouraging those in developed countries to purchase goods from which the profit is then given to assist orphans in under-developed nations.

One such organisation is the Muju Project. The organisation's home page states, 'The concept for the Muju Project is simple: Everything we sell goes towards saving lives. We believe that by activating the purchasing power of individuals to benefit those less fortunate we can make a tangible difference in the world.'

Our merchandise does more than just look good...every item sold helps to wipe out different social injustices such as; hunger, malnutrition, and human trafficking.'

Arguments in favour of Australia relaxing its regulations for foreign and local adoption

1. Australia has the lowest adoption rate in the world

Australia's inter-country and domestic adoption rates have been dramatically declining over the past few decades. In 2011/12 there were only 333 adoptions in Australia; the lowest annual adoption rate on record. The previous year, 2010/11 there were only 384; of these only 169 were adopted locally within Australia. The number has fallen from 1494 in 1987, so there has been a 78 per cent drop in the numbers of adoptions in Australia over the past 25 years. In 2012, only 78 children in foster arrangements were able to be adopted into permanent homes. Australia now has the second lowest adoption rate in the world.

Most of the adopted foreign children came from The Philippines, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Ethiopia and Thailand, with 86 per cent arriving from Asia.

The Federal Government banned adoptions from Ethiopia in June this year, citing an 'increasingly unpredictable, complex and uncertain' adoption environment in the impoverished African country.

Prospective parents are now waiting four-and-a-half years, on average, between the time they are given official approval and the child's arrival. Australians have to wait six years, on average to adopt a child from China.

Part of the reason for the fall in numbers is that there are more local adoptions occurring overseas. South Korea now gives priority to local adoptions, and has reduced the number of exit permits for children. Domestic adoption numbers in India have more than doubled in the past five years, and Thailand has introduced a quota for children sent overseas.

Lithuania now only accepts adoption applications from people of Lithuanian origin.

However, critics of Australia's adoption policies claim that the other half of the problem is the attitude of Australian state and federal governments, which, they claim, make it unnecessarily difficult to adopt either from within or outside Australia.

2. There is a pressing need for adoption places and a demand for children to adopt

The situation in New South Wales has been described as typical of that across Australia. There are more than 18,000 children in the foster care system seeking a permanent home. About a third of these have been uprooted at least three times and placed with new foster families. In 2010/11, when only 169 local adoptions occurred within Australia, there were 3347, 648 children who were living in out-of-home care.

New South Wales Families Minister, Pru Goward, has claimed there are 715 children on the waiting list for adoption. Ms Goward has stated, 'The number of adoptions is not going up enough.' She has argued that the target for the future should be 'in the hundreds'.

ABC reporter Annie Guest has asked, 'At a time when we hear stories about too many foster children and too few carers, many older women desperately wanting children, trying IVF and not being able to have children - at this time then why are there so few adoptions?'

Diane Harapin, a member of the National Adoption Awareness Week committee, has stated, 'Once you leave our shores and you see how many amazing kids there are needing a home, it's hard to imagine why we don't put more resources into helping families connect.'

The situation has been summed up by an Australian Women's Weekly editorial published on June 28, 2011. The editorial states, 'There are hundreds of thousands of children around the world who are genuinely orphaned, and would have access to better education, health care and opportunities if they could be adopted by a family in a developed country.'

Moreover, there are thousands of families in Australia who would love to give these children homes because they are not able to have children, or would prefer to adopt a child than go through IVF.'

Chief executive of the foster-care organisation Barnardos Australia, Louise Voigt, has claimed, 'We've been talking about this for years. The only adoptions we've managed to do is when we place ACT children in New South Wales. That's a most unsatisfactory situation because it means ACT families have no opportunity to adopt children.'

3. A secure family setting is necessary for children's wellbeing

It has been claimed that children in Australia in short-term care are being deprived of the security which is vital for their healthy development, as this security can only be derived from reliable, sensitive long-term care, such as that supplied by adoptive parents. It has further been claimed that the same concerns apply to orphans overseas, especially those living in impoverished or war-ravaged countries, who also lack secure, reliable long-term care...

Chief executive of the foster-care organisation Barnardos Australia, Louise Voigt, has claimed that adoption is important because it gives foster children a sense of security, and ensures a stable family well after the young person has turned 18.

Ms Voigt has stated, 'Children don't just relate to their family until they're 18. [Adoption] means mum and dad are around through those years of the early 20s, when mistakes are made and that background of security is there. It's a lifelong thing, adoption.'

In 2006, the New South Wales Department of Community Services, issued a report titled, 'The importance of attachment in the lives foster children'. The report states, 'Having a caregiver who provides consistent, responsive care helps children to learn to recognise the nature of their own emotions, and to regulate their own behaviour and emotional states. Through experiencing responsive and sensitive care-giving, a child also develops social competencies, empathy and emotional intelligence, and learns how to relate to other people and understand what to expect from them.'

The report further concludes, 'When a caregiver is sensitive to a child's emotional needs and responds positively, this helps the child to develop a sense of being loved and lovable. This is how children learn that they will be able to rely on others for help in times of trouble later in life. Children are better able to cope with traumatic experiences when their earlier experiences are of being safe and protected.'

4. Adoption processes need to be reformed to minimise the length of time children have to wait for adoptive parents

It has been claimed that far too many Australian children have been left waiting far too long for adoptive parents.

Indeed in many cases, these parents are never assigned.

Similar concerns have been expressed in the United Kingdom where a series of reforms have just been put in place, in an attempt to reduce the period of time children have to wait before they are placed with adoptive parents. Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of the UK Family Rights Group, has written, 'Politicians, the public and those of us in child welfare are united that children who cannot live with their families need the opportunity to be raised in a permanent, loving environment without unnecessary delays.'

Many cases apparently fail or are excessively delayed due to the resistance of the birth parents involved, even when they are incapable of raising the children themselves.

Critics have noted that there are ways around these obstacles. In New South Wales, adjustments are being made to adoption procedures which will help to minimise the opposition to adoption from birth parents who are unable to care for their children.

The new scheme recently adopted in New South Wales will focus on 'open adoption', meaning the child will be raised with another family but their biological parents will always maintain a relationship and connection to the adopted child. Critics have argued that such changes need to be made more generally to facilitate adoptions within Australia.

5. More support and fewer restrictions should be offered potential adoptive parents

It has been claimed that governments both in Australia and overseas place unnecessary burdens before adoptive parents, placing demands on them that are not placed on birth parents.

Joanna Moorehead, writing in the British newspaper, The Independent, on December 29, 2013, stated, 'Being single, fat or unemployed may be something you'd want to change in yourself, but it doesn't reduce your capacity to be a good parent.'

Simultaneously it has been argued that adoptive parents need to be offered more on-going support. Again, referring to the situation in the United Kingdom, Joanna Moorehead has stated, 'Families need to be supported not just around the adoption itself, but all the way down the line. They need to be offered whatever might be helpful - counselling, parents' groups, expert input - so it's there when they need it, if they need it, and for as long as they need it.' Similar demands have been made by adoptive parents' groups in Australia.

Further implications

It will be interesting to see what actually results from the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott's pledge to have the process for local adoptions within Australia streamlined. The sad history of Indigenous children being taken from their families and placed either in institutions or with white families, often with damaging results, has left a nation-wide caution around adoption. Equally concerning was the previous practice of forcibly taking children from unmarried mothers within Australia. It was only in March 2013 that former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, delivered a national apology in parliament to the thousands of unwed mothers who were forced by government policies to give up their babies for adoption over several decades. More than 800 people, many of them in tears, heard the apology and responded with a standing ovation.

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

In such a context, it is understandable that local adoption has been approached with scepticism.

Changes to local adoption procedures are also likely to proceed more slowly as they are a State not a federal government responsibility. The most the federal government could do would be to make a recommendation to State governments and perhaps host a meeting of the relevant state ministers to discuss the issue. The likelihood of local adoption procedures being relaxed will be in part dependent on the perceived success of the federal government's relaxation of inter-country adoption procedures.

Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline

AUST, November 5, 2013, page 5, news item by Rick Morton, 'Roxon "cover-up" on Ethiopian adoption'.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/roxon-cover-up-on-ethiopian-adoption/story-fn59niix-1226753075881>

AUST, November 22, 2013, page 8, news item by Rick Morton, 'Orphans left to beg since Roxon axed program'.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/orphans-left-to-beg-since-roxon-axed-program/story-fn59niix-1226765612817>

AGE, December 23, 2013, page 12, editorial, 'Smoothing the bumpy path to adoption'.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-age-editorial/smoothing-the-bumpy-path-to-adoption-20131222-2zt4y.html>

AUST, December 20, 2013, page 4, news item by Rick Morton, 'Adoption reform: show us the baby, say parents'.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/adoption-reform-show-us-the-baby-say-parents/story-fn59niix-1226786941098>

AGE, December 20, 2013, page 8, news item by J Swan et al, 'PM in bid to ease adoption process'.

<http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/conception/adoption/abbott-pledges-to-ease-the-way-for-australians-to-adopt-overseas-children-20131219-2zo8l.html>

AGE, January 25, 2014, page 4, news item by Rory Callinan, 'Campaign group calls for action on "illegal" adoption of Indian children'.

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/against-child-trafficking-campaign-group-calls-for-action-on-illegal-adoption-of-indian-children-20140124-31ecb.html>

AUST, March 4, 2014, page 4, news item by Patricia Karvelas, 'Foreign adoption barriers unlocked'.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-adoption-barriers-unlocked/story-fn59niix-1226844122329>