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The Speaker, **Mr Polley**, took the Chair at 11 a.m. and read Prayers.

### **APOLOGY TO PEOPLE HURT BY PAST FORCED ADOPTION PRACTICES**

[11.02 a.m.]

**Ms GIDDINGS** (Franklin - Premier - Motion) - Mr Speaker, I move -

- (1) That the Tasmanian community acknowledges and takes responsibility for the past practices of forced removal and adoption of children. We deeply regret that these past practices have caused great pain and suffering to mothers and their children, who are now adults, and have profoundly affected the lives of fathers, grandparents, siblings, partners and other family members.
- (2) To those people who have held their pain close for so many years, who have lived their lives under a shadow of secrecy, shame, anger, guilt and deeply held trauma and loss, we offer you our unreserved and sincerest apologies.
- (3) We accept with profound sorrow that mothers were not afforded the opportunity to give informed consent to the adoption of their children, nor were they informed of their rights or provided with the support that mothers need.
- (4) We deeply regret that mothers were treated in cruel and deeply disrespectful ways, and that many were not allowed to see or hold their babies.
- (5) To those mothers who had their babies taken from them, we acknowledge that you loved your babies and did not willingly give them away, and we are deeply sorry for this injustice and the harm it has caused.
- (6) We recognise that practices of our past mean that there are members of our community today who remain disconnected from their families of origin.
- (7) To the adopted children, who are now adults and who were denied the opportunity to grow up with, and be loved and cared for by their parents and families, we offer you our sincere and unreserved apology.
- (8) We acknowledge your loss of identity and the many difficulties created by not knowing your origins. For that we are deeply sorry.
- (9) To those Tasmanian families separated by an adoption that was forced upon them we express our heartfelt sympathy and we are sorry.

We acknowledge the lifelong damage that has been done to the lives of those affected by past forced adoption practices, and we commit to ensuring that these unethical, immoral and illegal practices are never repeated.

We come together today in this House, the three political parties united, to acknowledge the deep hurt caused by past forced adoption practices. We are here as representatives of the Tasmanian community to offer our sincere apology to mothers, fathers, their children who are now grown up, and their families. We come together to take responsibility for those practices which were wrong, not merely by today's values but also by the laws of the time.

I appreciate that not everyone who has been separated from a family member considers it a damaging experience and that there have been very positive and loving circumstances of adoption. I accept and respect those feelings. I also recognise that not everyone who has been separated from a family member by adoption feels that this apology is necessary, and I acknowledge their experience and the validity of their feelings.

It is the work of the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee and its 2012 report on the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices that has recently shone a light on these practices of our past. The report serves as a marker of time. It opens the door on the practices that took place throughout the country last century and it allows those of us who are not affected by these practices to look in at the truth.

We are here today delivering this apology because of the courage of those who spoke up during that inquiry. I acknowledge and pay tribute to the people who shared their experiences with the Senate committee as well as the previous Tasmanian inquiries, including the parliamentary inquiry in 1999. Some of you are here today and I thank you for coming.

It is important to understand what we mean by 'forced adoption'. The Senate committee report defines forced adoption as 'adoption where a child's natural parent, or parents, were compelled to relinquish a child for adoption'. We know from the report that young mothers and fathers were put under extreme emotional and physical pressure to consent to adoption. The barriers put in front of those mothers and fathers who wished to keep their children were too high, and the pressure to give up their children was far too great. They were given no choice at all.

The trauma caused by these past adoption practices has flowed like a tide through many lives, through families and through generations. It is difficult to know how many babies were taken from their mothers in Tasmania. The total number of recorded adoptions between 1920 and 1988 in Tasmania was over 11 000. These include adoptions by family members and inter-country adoptions. We have no way of knowing what proportion of these would be considered forced, and record-keeping during much of this period was very poor. It is also difficult to know exactly in which years these adoption practices took place, but we do know of babies being forcibly removed from their mothers into the 1980s.

Up until 1968, adoptions were generally arranged privately through solicitors. The introduction of the Adoption of Children Act in that year gave the Tasmanian government sole responsibility for arranging adoptions, and allowed for a charitable organisation to operate as a private adoption agency. Throughout this period of Tasmania's history babies continued to be forcibly removed from their mothers.

The illegality of these past practices is recognised by the Senate committee report, and we too acknowledge that the practices that took place at this time were illegal.

These decades of the twentieth century were particularly unforgiving for unmarried pregnant women. Australian society's judgment was harsh, and pregnancy outside marriage held with it a profound social stigma. The Senate committee reported that these women suffered isolation and systematic disempowerment by families, employers, society, religious communities, health professionals and maternity homes. Many of them were considered to have brought shame upon their family, their church and their community.

One mother in her submission to the Senate inquiry described the consequences of shame. She said, 'His four grandparents, rather than braving the shame and whispers, preferred to save face and give him away; dispatch him to a life with strangers. So I was sent to an unmarried mothers' home to wait for our son's birth'. The women themselves have said they were treated like dirt, and made to feel like they were bad girls, and these feelings have stayed with them.

It doesn't take long in Tasmania to find people who have been affected by past adoption practices. I am honoured to have met some of the women and men who have experienced trauma as a result of these past adoption practices. Many of you are here today. Some of you have also shared your stories as part of our consultation over recent months, and I thank you for your courage and your openness that has led us to this apology today.

It is impossible to dismiss these stories as happening too long ago, to people who are foreign to us, in places that are unfamiliar. These things happened in our lifetimes, or the lifetimes of our parents. The practices were carried out by people in trusted roles in institutions that are familiar to us, like the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Queen Victoria Hospital, Elim Maternity Hospital and Rocklyn Maternity Hospital.

To you, the mothers, the stories of your experiences are difficult for many of us to comprehend, but we know they are real. By speaking about your experiences today we hope we can bring them into the light and we can open our hearts to your grief.

We respect that each story of forced adoption is unique. We know some Tasmanian mothers were sent off to other places - maternity homes, far away, and in secret - to have their babies. We cannot begin to imagine how terrified you, as young women, would have felt, with unfamiliar changes happening to your bodies, forced to carry the burden of shame, guilt and secrecy, and then to be sent off to a foreign place, alone, with no-one to look after you.

Mothers have told us of their experiences of being drugged during labour, of pain medication being withheld as a punishment for being unmarried. Some of you had your faces covered with pillows as you gave birth. Your babies were taken away before you could see them, and sometimes kept on a separate floor until their adoptive parents took them home. You were not allowed to touch or hold your baby. That most pure and instinctive human need was denied to you as a mother. You were not given the opportunity to name your child. You were not even told whether you had a girl or a boy, or whether your baby was healthy. Some of you had glimpses of paperwork or heard whispers in rooms, and you clung desperately to those tiny snippets of information about your babies. It was all you had.

You were offered no choices; adoption was almost always the only recommendation to you. You were not told about your rights or the financial support that was available to you. Some of you were forced to sign paperwork while influenced by medication; others had your signatures forged. Some of you did not give consent at all. Some of you were lied to and told your babies had died. Some of you were not told that by law you had 30 days to revoke your decision to place your baby for adoption, and so you were not aware of the protection the State had tried to give you, and when some of you, or your relatives, went back to get your baby within those 30 days you found your babies had gone.

Birth certificates were reissued in the adoptive parents' names and strict rules governed access to information. This practice, as well as poor record-keeping, made finding your babies later so very difficult. We acknowledge that those barriers have added another weight to your grief and for that we are profoundly sorry.

You were told that you would make other couples happy by giving away your children. You were told that if you loved your babies you would give them up. Then later you were told that if you truly loved your children, you would never have given them away.

What you have told us you want is for your children to know that you loved them and that you did not willingly give them away. Your love for them was no less just because they were taken from you, and the pain of your loss has stayed with you since that time. To you, the mothers who have suffered so much, we acknowledge your anger and your grief and your deep, deep loss, and we are sorry. We are sorry that many of you were not believed when you spoke about what had happened to you. We want you to know that we believe you now.

To the children, who are now grown up and who have lived lives full of questions without answers, we recognise you have suffered profound feelings of abandonment and loss and have struggled with issues of identity. Even those of you who knew about your adoption from an early age could never quell those nagging questions: 'Why didn't my mother want me? Why couldn't my mother keep me?'. These were understandable questions, but they were based on fears and assumptions which most of you learned later did not reflect the grief, guilt and trauma that your mothers suffered, both then and now. Knowing the truth did not stop the constant imagining, which many of you describe as like living in a vacuum. Despite wanting to connect with your adoptive families, for many of you it didn't feel like it was really your story, your history. Living in the middle, you were anxious to do the right thing, but you were not really connected.

Some of you have stumbled upon your story later in life and this has led to deep trauma. We cannot imagine how it must feel to discover inadvertently that you were adopted, and then to find that you were removed from a mother who was given no choice. These actions have left wounds that have never healed. Just to undertake the journey to connect with a mother or father has been a challenge for most adopted people. I know you have suffered the pull of loyalty to those who have raised you and loved you, feeling that it is ungrateful to hurt adoptive parents by finding your mother and your father. Against this pull of loyalty was the constant yearning to know the family you never had.

We know that when some adopted people are reunited with their parents they can find that it is very difficult as adults to build a bond damaged by years of separation. There is often too much to say and too much unspoken. We understand that this journey has cost you dearly at every stage; not only is there the internal anguish, but there are consequences for attachment, self-esteem and commitment. To you, those children who are now adults, we acknowledge your trauma and your loss, and we are sorry.

Fathers of the children who were forcibly removed were treated harshly by past adoption practices. You are the silent dispossessed. Many of you were pushed out and not given the opportunity to give your consent for the adoption. Those who attempted to be involved were often actively discouraged. Some of you were threatened with police action and warned to keep away. For many, no options were given as to what to do next, nor were you asked whether you would like to get married or be a father. You were shut out and ignored and in some cases were barred from the place where your baby was born. Mothers were discouraged from formally identifying the father of the child, and so your name was not put on the birth certificate. This meant that you were truly unknown to your child. These actions led later to the misconception by children that their fathers did not want to know them, that they didn't care or want to be involved, but the truth for many fathers is that they had their power taken away from them and were not given a say. You were told to get on with your lives and forget about what had happened.

We know from the Senate inquiry that as a consequence of these experiences, some of you were left with a legacy of stress, anxiety and substance abuse. Many of you have held onto feelings of guilt at putting the mothers through pain and of a profound sadness that your child would never know you. To those fathers who wanted to love and take care of their babies but were given no choice, we are sorry.

The damage wrought by these past adoption practices went beyond the mothers, fathers and the children who are now adults. Other family members have lived their lives carrying the burden of secrecy, guilt and shame. They too have suffered deep emotional pain and, in some cases, the disintegration of their own families.

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the members of our communities who have died without finding their children or their parents. To those family members, and the families of those who are no longer with us, we are sorry for your pain and your loss.

There are people who live among us who have been holding close a dark, terrible pain for many, many years. Many still keep those secrets tightly held, and to them we say it is not your fault; laws were broken, and for that we are sorry.

There are many people, some of whom are here today, who have found the courage deep inside them, buried under the weight of shame and guilt and fear, to tell their stories. They have told their stories to loved ones, to counsellors, and in public, to inquiries in Tasmania and to the recent Senate committee inquiry. You probably do not know the power of your stories, but I would like you to know that by telling your stories you have given others the courage to come forward. You have lit the path so that others may walk upon it. By telling your stories you share your pain with each of us, and together we have the strength to bear it.

The Senate committee report described the relief felt by one woman when she found out that there was an inquiry. She said, 'It's like being buried alive. ... I've been clawing the lid of the coffin trying to get out, and someone has just lifted the lid off for me ... and I'm gulping fresh air'.

I know that by making this apology today we are shining the light on some dark secrets and deeply held fears, and

that some people may not want that to happen. I hope that by saying sorry we can help lighten their burden. The laws and practices of today are far removed from the adoption practices of our past.

Members of this House, as representatives of the Tasmanian community, come together today to express our determination to ensure that such practices never happen again. We commit to providing specialised counselling support and free access to records, as well as a permanent memorial as an expression of our heartfelt sympathy. We offer this unreserved and sincere apology as an expression of our open-hearted compassion and support for those who have suffered so much.

I commend the motion to the House.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[11.23 a.m.]

**Mr HODGMAN** (Franklin - Leader of the Opposition) - The Tasmanian Liberals join today in saying unreservedly to those affected by the past practices of forced removal and adoption of children, we are sorry. We apologise to the mothers who were vulnerable, in need of support and in need of care but who were denied it, and were denied the chance to hold their babies and in many cases to even see them. We apologise for the shame, the guilt, the secrets they were forced to keep, the hopelessness and despair they felt when they were told to put their feelings in a box and never let them out. We are sorry for the moralistic and judgmental attitudes that prevailed where a woman who was pregnant and unmarried was shamed, silenced and seen as unfit to raise a child.

We apologise to the children, now adults, who were taken from their mothers at birth; children who were never abandoned but who were loved and wanted, and we are sorry for the profound effect this has had on the lives of mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, siblings and partners, fracturing the families.

Today's apology cannot replace your loss. It cannot change the past or undo what happened to you, but we understand for you that public recognition of past wrongs, a simple acknowledgement that your experiences were real, is a very important step that we take today. We understand you were not to blame, we say you are not alone and we commit as best we can to righting these wrongs and ensuring that they are never repeated.

It is sobering that of those 11 000 adoptions in Tasmanian between 1920 and 1988 it is reported that the vast majority were the children of single unmarried mothers. In that time pregnancy outside marriage was stigmatised, casting a coat of guilt and shame across the mother and diminishing the status of the illegitimate child. It would be naïve and indeed negligent for us to think that even today there are not some remnants of this stigma in our modern society and we must be vigilant in repudiating this misguided view and in future properly supporting the mothers and their children who are in this situation. It is one of the lessons from today and for the future.

As the Tasmanian parliamentary inquiry in 1999 found - perversely, in those decades now behind us - it was a time when society placed a higher value on female virginity before marriage than on the bond between a mother and a baby. It was a time when secrecy, guilt and shame prevailed and when the system and our community failed. It is ironic that before the 1920s things were in many respects better. Many mothers were better supported, able to keep their babies, helped to find accommodation. There were lying-in homes and rescue homes and young mothers remained with their babies and were often later found jobs to support the child. After that and lasting right through to the 1960s and 1970s there was the pervasive underscore of stigma attached to illegitimacy and pregnancy outside marriage.

To the mother, her child, and her family, an extreme pressure was bearing down on each of these vulnerable people. It is an exasperating exercise to fathom how a society could impose such a burden. It has been said it was a combination of social and economic pressures that led to these attitudes. Historical references of the time refer to the morality of the mother's behaviour and of adoption being seen as the perfect solution, a clean break, a chance for a fresh start for the woman but, of course, this ignored the fundamental bond between mother and child. It also ignored the lifelong trauma when that bond is broken in a cruel and harsh manner in the way that many of these adoptions occurred.

It is clear that the inadequate systems of adoption procedures under Tasmanian laws, which at that time dated back to the 1920s, contributed to an array of inappropriate practices and terrible consequences. Mums have spoken about the cruel and harsh treatment they suffered during labour and immediately afterwards - harsh and judgmental attitudes, being sedated, given lactation suppressants. Some were being told, 'You have made your bed so now you must lie in it'. The evidence is that even in the mid-1970s there were separate wards maintained on maternity floors. There were segregated wards for these unmarried women. While practices varied, some mothers never held their child, others were given only a short time together. Others were made to breastfeed their baby as a punishment for being a bad girl. These overwhelming comments from mothers were that the painful and lasting feeling of loss and deprivation after being separated from their baby are feelings that persist to this time.

It is hard to fathom how the parents of a pregnant daughter would make the decision to relinquish their own grandchild, their daughter having no say, no choice, no support. It was a time when bright and pregnant young women were sent away to other parts of the state or even interstate to give birth with no consideration for their fears, feelings or wishes. It was a time when families wanted to conceal what they believed was their daughter's shame and they went to extraordinary lengths to preserve that secrecy. Young women who fell pregnant outside of marriage were shunned by their families fearing what the community would think, and that held more weight than their daughter's wishes or the wellbeing of the mother and the child. Women were told they could not return to their family home with their illegitimate child, and that no man would want a woman with a baby.

They were told to place their babies for adoption, to forget about it and to get on with their lives. Or they were told that their baby was being taken away by welfare. They were told they were wicked and they had no right to keep their baby. These daughters were quietly withdrawn from community life, a life with their baby, coerced, cajoled and bullied into placing that child for adoption and given no choice. Often they did not provide informed consent. They were denied the advice, the support and the right to give it, often with no support from their family. There was certainly no support from society and no means by which a woman in those circumstances could hope to raise and support the baby herself.

There were horrendous cases; a married woman whose baby died at birth was simply handed the child of an unmarried woman to take home from hospital. Some mothers were told their baby had died when it had not. Parents were denied signing adoption consent forms. Many refuted the authenticity of signatures on them, many signed under duress, under the influence of drugs and sedatives shortly after birth, with information on the adoption form concealed.

There were many cases of young men, committed and willing to provide support for the mother of their child and for that child, but also denied that through its illegitimacy. In many cases the name of the father was deliberately left off the adoption form, even though the father was known. In other cases the names of fathers were added when no name had been given. There were cases of the sex of a child being deliberately altered on adoption forms where a birth mother believed she had a daughter, only to be confronted years later by a young man as her son.

It is a confounding and perhaps fruitless exercise to try to comprehend how this could ever have happened, other than to learn the lessons of the past and to help those who suffered to heal. Whatever the reasons, we are not here today to excuse. We are here today to apologise and that is what we do.

Towards the end of the 1960s and 1970s, thankfully public attitudes began to change, not only to sex outside marriage but also to pregnancy and childbirth outside marriage. There was contraception. Woman had a choice. A significant change was the introduction of the supporting mothers benefit in 1973, giving single mums the financial support to keep their babies without support available from a man or even from their families. They were given that support. This saw a substantial drop in the number of children being placed for adoption and the greater acceptance of unmarried mothers. Adoption agencies were formed to help adopted children reunite with their biological parents. Laws changed to reflect the reality that a large number of mothers and adopted children had a deep desire to be reunited at some time in their lives.

The women to whom this apology applies today were forced into placing their children for adoption. They had no

choice, no rights and no compassion. This is a shameful episode in our history for which we should, and which we do, sincerely and unreservedly apologise.

I want to acknowledge the courage of all those across the country and, indeed, especially here in our home state of Tasmania who, for many years have fought against the stigma, the secrecy, the guilt and the shame. They have come forward to tell their stories - poignant, horrifying, incomprehensible stories. Many told their stories over a decade ago in this parliament in the inquiry into adoption and related services and, more recently, to the Senate inquiry in the Parliament of Australia. Many more cannot do so and many never will.

We also acknowledge those who report a happier experience, with children adopted into loving, caring and supportive families and parents who made themselves available to adopt a child, regardless of its circumstances, giving it a caring family and a positive future. They must be acknowledged also and thanked. But it is for the children and their mothers who suffered that we are here today to say sorry.

No two stories are the same, but the overwhelming common thread of those affected by past adoption practices has been one of grief and loss but also courage. Women have told us of the ongoing tormenting mental anguish they suffer that there is something wrong with them because they simply cannot forget what has happened. I have heard of a man estranged from his mother, resenting for many years what happened to him as a child. Now as we apologise to him he is unable to reconcile with his mother, who died some years ago, so he now suffers another layer of guilt and regret. Many feel some stark secret inside of them and there is no-one they can tell. They are shameful and that feeling has persisted through their adult lives. Some made silent promises to their babies that they would find them again. Hundreds of mothers spent every day of their lives wondering. Others have relayed feelings of having felt for years abandoned by their families, by society, by the system, and an unshakeable sense of hopelessness.

There are stories of babies placed for adoption and taken overseas, never to be reunited. One woman secretly celebrated her baby's birthday every year and looked for her child in the faces of children in the playground. She kept her baby alive in her heart, only to learn a long, long time afterwards that the baby had died as an infant. She was never told of that death and when she was, she felt like she had lost that baby all over again. Many women later discovered the longer-term impacts of adoption practices on their reunification with their adopted child, as contacts between biological parents and adopted children - which can bring great joy - are not always successful or easy. Some of those children were adopted into a childhood of brutality and humiliation, despite their biological mum being promised that their baby would go to a good home. Some of the children who were adopted could not understand why their mothers were forced to place them for adoption, and this has made their reunification stressful and traumatic for all.

As a father, the birth of my three children was without doubt the most beautiful, moving, inspirational moment in my life - a truly magical bond. I cannot even comprehend a situation where a child, a baby, would be taken away against the parents' will. I certainly cannot comprehend how a mother would feel, how excruciating it would be to be immediately separated, to not even have the chance to hold or to see the baby you had carried.

From the Senate inquiry we are told that a mother whose child has been stolen does not only remember in her mind, she remembers with every fibre of her being, and this heart-wrenching piece from the national inquiry tells us just how a mother did feel:

I would lie in bed every night with my arms wrapped around my baby inside of me, knowing that I would never hold him after birth. I would feel his feet and hands through my own stomach as he moved around, knowing that I wasn't ever going to feel them after he was born. I would talk to him and tell him I would find him again one day and, after that, I and his father loved him and always would.

Mr Speaker, I know that for the women, for the children, for the families here today and across our state, this apology is important. It is about respect and public recognition that your experiences were real. You have suffered, you were wronged, and we are sorry. Today cannot right those wrongs, nor can it restore your rights, but we hope today is a step forward towards healing, with a united commitment to learn from the lessons of the past and vow they

are never repeated.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[11.40 a.m.]

**Mr McKIM** (Franklin - Leader of the Greens) - I rise on behalf of the Tasmanian Greens to join with all members of this House in acknowledging the hurt and suffering caused by the horrific past practice of forced adoption. We also join with all members of this House to issue our most unreserved and sincere apology.

None of us in this House can truly understand what it was like for all those people affected, but we owe it to each and every one of those people to at least try to imagine how we would feel if it was us who went through this trauma. I know all members will have read in the Senate inquiry report or heard by direct communication, including speaking to people who were impacted, about some of the terrible stories that occurred. There were many stories and many tragedies that occurred in the past. I want to mention a couple here today.

From the Senate inquiry and testimony in recent consultations undertaken by the Tasmanian government, we have heard from mothers who said, 'We were treated like dirt'. Another said, 'We were made to feel like we were bad girls', and that has stayed with them their whole life. Many at the time were given variations on the words, 'If you love it' - speaking about their child - 'you will give it away'. As well as the coercion that this involves, they were so greatly upset the baby was referred to as 'it', not 'him' or 'her' or 'your baby'. They referred to practices such as having their faces covered with pillows as they gave birth so they could not see their baby and that baby being taken away without being able to see them.

I had the honour of speaking this morning with Margaret Gibbons, a mother who went through the terrible trauma of being forced to give up her baby. While she was in labour, as a 17-year-old, the doctor said to her, 'You've had your fun; now you're paying the price'. Margaret was allowed no visitors and no support while she was in the institution. Margaret told me this morning that she has learned to live with what happened but has had a hole in her heart her whole life. Margaret also told me a terrible part of her experience, and I offer this as evidence of the level of trauma so many mothers and other people went through. Another mother in the same institution was told that her child had died. Margaret does not know whether that child died or not, but she told me this morning she could not help thinking how lucky that mother was that her child had died because at least she knew what had happened to her baby. Margaret did not know what was going to happen to her baby. This does not reflect on Margaret in the slightest; it reflects on the horrendous practices that have occurred in the past.

These are nightmares, but they are real nightmares. There are so many more examples that there is not time to relate here. Tragically, there are many more that have never been told and some that never will be told because for some this acknowledgement and this apology comes too late because their lives have already ended. These terrible, terrible stories of mothers who never got to hold or say goodbye to their child, fathers who never got to see their child, parents denied the right to hold and know their child are real stories. They are not delusions or fanciful excuses made up by those trying to find someone else to blame for what they were told were their own mistakes.

Some people have understandably carried the knowledge of what happened as a terrible secret through part or all of their lives. No apology or acknowledgement can truly make adequate reparation. These overwhelmingly young women were criticised for getting pregnant out of wedlock, then criticised for wanting to keep their child and, in some cases, after they went back to their homes they were subjected to criticism for giving up their child - all this during the twentieth century, in a society which considered itself to be civilised and free. There is no way to sugar-coat this; it is one of the greatest moral and legal failings in Tasmania's history.

The Senate inquiry report summarised the 'clean break' theory which it says underpinned much of the past practices. The report says that a clean break would supposedly allow both parties to forget about the past and forge a life free from stigma, but in reality the so-called 'clean break' condemned many to be haunted by the past and suffer a life unfairly shrouded by a sense of shame and guilt.

We acknowledge here today the depth and degree of immediate and long-term trauma, grief and loss. We

acknowledge these past wrongs, that women were coerced and intimidated and bullied into giving up their babies. We acknowledge that they were not believed and we acknowledge that this was an abuse of power. We acknowledge that in many instances the mothers and fathers did not and were not able to give informed consent for the removal of their baby. We acknowledge impacts such as loss of identity for those adopted as children but who are now grown-up adults often searching for answers.

Of course there will be tears shed today but none of those tears - which I acknowledge I shed as a genuine response and acknowledgement of a shared humanity - can come close to the decades of tears shed by those who lived it and continue to live it. As cited in the Senate committee inquiry report:

A mother whose child has been stolen does not only remember in her mind, she remembers with every fibre of her body.

This is a significant day. Not only is it a day in which a long-overdue and long-awaited acknowledgement and apology is finally being provided but, significantly, this apology recognises that these horrendous past practices were illegal. They are morally reprehensible and unfathomable to us today but it is also fundamentally important to clearly acknowledge that they were wrong, and legally wrong. These practices should not be dismissed as just a society evolving, as some have tried to excuse them; these were unlawful and immoral acts. We should all today be proud to be in the first Australian parliament that has had the guts to call it as it is and state on the public record that these practices were illegal.

So many affected parents and other people have stated clearly that an acknowledgement and an apology is vital for their ongoing journey moving towards a place of healing and internal peace. The past must be acknowledged to free people to try to move forward. None of us here today will try to suggest that an apology will undo the hurt, the pain, the social dislocation or loss of identity. It will not suddenly make lost and missing records appear, but we hope that this apology and acknowledgement provides a bridge to a better future. As such, it is important to acknowledge that this apology is a first step, an important but preliminary step, and there must - and as the Premier has confirmed today - and will be ongoing support and assistance provided.

It was not only the government of the day that was involved. There were other non-government organisations that were also involved and complicit in these appalling practices. Some of those are yet to face up to their responsibilities and issue formal apologies, and I urge them to do so.

There are still many in our community who are oblivious to these unacceptable events, or at least unaware of the specific circumstances or the trauma experienced by those affected. There will be many who are unaware that this affected or continues to affect their neighbours, their family members, and their workmates. Our office had contact from an adopted person whose efforts to contact their mother led them to contact their uncle. This person was completely unaware that his sister had ever had this child until over 30 years later when the now adult nephew made contact.

Many reports and inquiries have recommended that community support and educational material should also be developed and made available to help foster greater understanding and awareness across all levels of our society, which is very laudable in their intent. But if we are going to stand here today and promise to learn from the past, as we all are, then we need to not just pay lip service to the past. We have to make sure that ongoing and meaningful measures to address past wrongs and to provide ongoing support still occur.

There has been such suffering and such damage. On behalf of all members I would like to acknowledge and thank the Premier for the commitments she has announced today detailing areas of dedicated support that will be provided by the state. I also welcome the commitment to the development of an appropriate permanent memorial to mark this sad and shocking period in our history. It cannot and must not be allowed to be forgotten, and we all undertake here today to ensure that it is never again swept back beneath the carpet.

I also want to be clear that it is our firm understanding that the prime reason that so many affected people have taken such a brave and courageous step of speaking out is absolutely not about seeking financial compensation, as

some have attempted to paint it. Fortunately it is only a few who have tried to put this slant on these calls for acknowledgement. I want to take the opportunity to personally thank the many brave and resolute people who, knowing that their motivation could be misconstrued, still stood up and spoke out. That determination to stand up for natural justice and strength of character to pursue the cause, no matter how hard it was, is a true testament to incredible strength of character and clarity of purpose and it puts to shame all those who continued to try to deny their efforts. It puts to shame those who participated in or condoned or allowed these practices, finally acknowledged here today as illegal. It puts to shame those who have tried to deny that anything wrong or untoward occurred. It puts to shame those who have since tried to brush this sad part of our history beneath the carpet and imply that these women, men, and adoptees should just get over it.

There will be those for whom this long-overdue recognition has come too late. We have to face up to the sad fact there are mothers who have since died without ever finding their babies, now adults, and there are adopted children who have died before their mothers or members of their family of origin could find them. That is the tragic and unavoidable human toll that must also be acknowledged.

On behalf of the Greens I want to place on the record our thanks and appreciation to the Premier for heeding the calls for Tasmania to issue this overdue apology to those affected by these horrific past practices. I also wish to thank all those who assisted in making this apology and this acknowledgement happen within the Premier's office and the departmental staff involved. These are obviously very difficult issues to work with. I also want to pay tribute to my colleague, Paul O'Halloran, and his staff and other staff supporting the Greens who have driven the call for a formal apology on behalf of the Greens and who have worked closely with affected people to secure the necessary and appropriate recognition.

Today, however, is for the mothers, the Tasmanians who were adopted under these shocking circumstances, the siblings they were denied the chance to grow up with, the fathers, and the grandparents they never knew. The parliament owes them, many of whom are here today, an incredible debt of thanks. We do not take lightly the massive effort and toll it has taken on many of you to share your experiences and participate in the events that have led up to today, or the ongoing effort it will still require to move forward. We thank you for your fortitude, your resolve and your sheer determination not to give up in your fight to reconnect with your families.

Today is about connections; it is about recognising the connection between mother and child, which so many of us take for granted as our given right to celebrate. It is also about recognising that for some, that fundamental connection was severed cruelly and unforgivably through no fault of either the mother or child. It is about recognising the connection between actions and consequences. These horrific policies had seismic consequences for so many Tasmanians, so many women and children and other family members, which are still felt today.

Today is also about reconnecting. It is our hope that this may smooth the path towards family members being able to reconnect. It can also herald a new stage in the journey where mothers and adoptees can access necessary documents and files, where people who may never meet their families of origin in person can still move a little towards reconnecting with their sense of identity via records which can at least provide them with their initial birth name and the name of their birth parents.

Today is also about reconnecting decision makers with the consequences of past policy decisions made. It is a sad truth that we have to draw these dots before the picture will be acknowledged, but by connecting those dots between actions and consequences we now have a responsibility to squarely face the picture that emerges and to learn from it.

The struggle by many mothers to reconnect with their child, which has spilled out from the shadows of shame and emerged from beneath the carpets under which it was once swept, has forced us all to confront this awful truth. We owe you all a debt of thanks for ensuring that this veil of secrecy and disbelief has been drawn aside here today. What happened was wrong, it should never have happened, and it cannot and must not be allowed to happen again. We pledge to you here today that we will do everything in our power to ensure that this does not happen again. We unreservedly apologise to those here today, to those who are unable to attend, and we also apologise to those for whom this formal apology has arrived too late. We are so very, very sorry.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[12.00 p.m.]

**Ms O'BYRNE** (Bass - Minister for Health) - I join with members in offering an unreserved apology for the grief and suffering caused by the practice of forced adoption. I have been honoured to have people affected by this shocking practice share their experiences with me. I have been told of situations where the practice was unethical, of situations where mothers had been denied the right to hold and nurture their newly-born child, of mothers not informed of their rights and of consent being gained through force and deceit, of young mothers who were ostracised, degraded and diminished. It is clear that past practices continue to have a devastating effect on many people within our community.

I open my heart to your hurt and I am sorry for the harm and the deprivation caused by having your babies forcibly removed. I am sorry for the past policy and practice of secrecy, preventing either the child or parents from getting basic information of each other's existence and wellbeing and for the denial of the right to establish and maintain relationships. As a mother, I have been deeply affected by what I have been told. I think of the moment when I held my babies for the first time. I think of my own relationship with my children and how special that is to me and them. I cannot help but ask myself how I would have coped in the same situation in which many young mothers were placed. I cannot imagine never knowing my children. I cannot imagine never being able to receive their love.

Today I thank those brave people who have shared their experiences so the broader community is aware of the devastating impact that this past practice has had on so many lives. I thank all of those who have made representations to the state and national inquiries, allowing lessons to be learned to ensure the past practices will not be repeated. I also thank those who recently helped the government shape this apology and our ongoing support services.

There have been several inquiries over the years into past and future adoption laws and practices within Tasmania, most recently the report from the Senate Community Affairs References Committee. These inquiries have significantly raised the community's awareness and deepened our understanding of people's experiences of forced adoption.

I also note with interest a research report prepared by the Australian Institute of Family Studies which presents the findings of the national research study on the service response to past adoption practices. The study was undertaken to contribute to and strengthen the evidence available to governments so they could respond to those affected by past adoption practices. It considers the need for information, counselling and reunion services. The study targeted a wide group of those with experience of past practices relating to closed adoption in Australia. This includes mothers and fathers separated from a child by adoption, adopted individuals, adopted grandparents and wider family members as well as those servicing current needs such as counsellors, psychologists and other professionals. As such, it is a very comprehensive report and one that compellingly represents the views of a cross-section of those involved.

For many, participation in this research allowed them to articulate their stories and have their experience recognised in a way that could inform public opinion and public policy. Obviously, every individual had their own unique perspective, but there were some common themes that emerged. For example, many of the mothers who participated in the study were interested in having their stories told. They wanted the broader community to know what it was like for them to be young, unmarried and pregnant at a time when the stigma of such a situation was incredibly daunting and frightening. Many described the stigma as so powerful that they had few viable options for keeping their children, if any.

For adoptees, they also wanted to tell their stories and dispel some of the myths surrounding what it means to be adopted. The responses in the report highlighted the general lack of understanding and awareness in the broader community that has led to many in our community being oblivious about what it means to be affected by such an experience from the period of closed adoption in Australia and unaware of how they should respond accordingly.

By way of example, many of the mothers described the reasoning used at the time to justify the adoption of their child was focused directly around the perception that they were unable to care for their child and that their child would

be much better off without them. It assumed that they were incapable because of their age, inexperience, lack of financial stability and lack of family support. The survey responses showed that many of them had been working. Indeed, they may have been nurses or teachers; they were financially stable and they were invariably educated. They had not all been teenagers. In fact, this study showed that the majority of respondents were over 19 at the time of the birth. Mothers also emphasised how these misconceptions created enduring messages about their identity that have manifested themselves as negative beliefs about themselves to the present day.

Adoptees disclosed that they rarely felt that their experiences had been validated or reviewed as of being of any real consequence and that the effects of their adoption on their lives, both positive and negative, had for the most part not been recognised. For some adoptees their experience has been compounded by feeling ostracised from the community which perceived adoption as being something to be ashamed of. It is important that the stories and experiences captured through this research are not lost and forgotten. Indeed, one of the most important things that participants said would be of benefit to them now and into the future was acknowledgement of the common adoption practices of the past and recognition of the subsequent effects that have been experienced by those affected.

As noted in the research report, the apology delivered today is about starting the conversation and ending the silence. It is about allowing those who have been affected to have a voice that they have not felt they previously have been able to have, and today we can let them know that their stories will have an effect.

Importantly, these reports and the stories in them have and will continue to shape future adoption services. The AIFS research report also considered the service use and needs of people affected by past adoption practices. According to the report over half of the adopted individuals and almost 70 per cent of the mothers have used search contact services. For many, however, cost remains a barrier to accessing information. It is also clear that there is a need for clear and simple processes for accessing information supported by appropriately trained staff to ensure the wellbeing of the individuals who are seeking information and support.

Similarly, accessing professional support and counselling can be a barrier, with many frustrated by their experience of GPs, counsellors and other professionals, who are either not aware of or dismiss the effect that separation through adoption has had on their lives. However, those who had good support found it life-saving. In these cases, those professionals understood adoption-specific issues and the trauma lens through which a lot of their issues need to be viewed. Again, unfortunately, the cost of accessing these services was identified as a barrier for some people.

We have heard the messages contained within this and other reports. We have heard the need for further concrete actions to accompany this apology. Today the Premier has committed to providing extra specialised counselling support, free access to records and a permanent memorial. This means a number of things. Firstly, it means that people who have been affected by the past practice of forced adoption will have access to additional specialist counselling services. The proposed counselling service will be responsive to the needs of those affected, with staff who are trained in responding to trauma and disenfranchised grief. Secondly, access to information is a theme within the Senate report, and we are aware that where people are able to access such information openly, that information can be powerful and often positive in addressing their concerns and anguish. This will mean a streamlined process for people seeking records held by the state about their past adoption. The service is also going to be free, with fees charged to access records waived for those who have been affected by past forced adoption practices and, while the improved process is to be implemented before the end of the year, we will be waiving the fees from Monday.

Lastly, it is important that this apology is not a one-off. We need to ensure that the experiences of those affected are appropriately commemorated. The Department of Health and Human Services will work with Tasmanians and key community stakeholders to develop a lasting memorial to the experience of those affected.

Australian adoption law and practice changed rapidly in the 1970s and continues to evolve and these changes provide safeguards to prevent past mistakes being repeated. The Adoptions Act as it currently stands has been informed by the many experiences arising from past policy and practice. Contemporary practice recognises that decisions about adoption are difficult and traumatic. Counselling is provided to all parents considering adoption to ensure that they are aware of the range of supports that are available to them. Unresolved grief and loss and

difficulties in understanding relationships and identity can have significant long-term consequences and we need safeguards to ensure that any parental consent is freely given and is achieved in a sensitive, considered way.

Importantly, consent cannot be given in the first nine days after birth and parents giving consent are provided with detailed information and counselling and they can reverse the decision. Laws have been changed to reflect the reality that a large proportion of natural parents and adoptees have a deep desire to become united at some point in their lives. Open adoptions have replaced past secrecy.

In closing, I hope that today's apology is a step closer in the healing and recovery of all people affected by forced adoptions. I am lucky. I will go home to Launceston tonight and I will hold my children and I will feel their arms around me. For those who have been denied this, who have been so hurt, I am truly sorry. We are truly sorry.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[12.10 p.m.]

**Ms PETRUSMA** (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, as my colleague and Liberal leader, Will Hodgman, has expressed, the Tasmanian Liberals join with the Tasmanian community in sincerely apologising for the past practices of forced removal and adoption of children in this state.

As a registered nurse, I have comforted women who have lost a baby. From having a miscarriage myself, I have personally experienced the grief and sorrow associated with the loss of a baby. However, I do not pretend for a second that I could ever truly understand the extent of the anguish and loss experienced by women who were forced to place their children up for adoption because to me, as a mother of four, this anguish and loss is incomprehensible. I could never imagine for a second not being able to hold my babies after giving birth.

Today is only a start to acknowledging your loss and your pain by giving you this apology. Today we lament a shameful episode in our history where unwed mothers were subject to intense social disapproval and forced into giving their child up for adoption. Today we apologise to you for a system that betrayed you.

We also apologise to the children who were placed for adoption, who grew up not knowing the truth and were denied the love of their biological mothers and fathers. Today's motion commits to ensuring that such practices are never repeated.

Wearing my hats as shadow minister for children and as someone who was a single mother herself and now as a grandmother whose daughter is also a young single mum, I passionately believe that more must be done so that we can be confident of this. We need to ensure that enough support is given to keep mothers and babies together, especially young single mothers, as I honestly do not know how my daughter would have coped bringing up her child by herself if she did not have my husband and I available 24 hours a day.

We also need to ensure that enough and the right supports are in place for babies still being removed today from mothers shortly after birth and placed in foster care situations on 18-year orders, and this should only happen as a very last resort.

There is a saying that those who do not learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them. There are a lot of lessons to be learned from this apology today and a lot of lessons to be learned from the women who have bravely spoken out on the practices of the past. I know those women would not want to see the Tasmanian parliament having to repeat this apology in another 50 years for the practices of today. I say simply we must make sure that we do everything we can to keep mothers and babies together, especially to support, nurture and encourage young single mothers.

While adoption practices in Australia have undergone considerable change, I have been asked by many to also speak today about the need to break down the barriers Australia-wide to access information for biological parents and adopted persons alike. A few issues of concern have been raised with me.

One is the difficulty and cost of obtaining birth records, and I am pleased to see today that the Premier has

committed to provide free access to records. Another concern is the need for counselling and support services for mothers who are forced to place their child for adoption and also for adopted persons. Likewise, I am pleased to see today's commitment to providing specialised counselling support.

The third matter is the difficulty for an adopted person to access information about their biological family's medical history. Such knowledge can be critical to the adopted person's health and mental wellbeing, as well as to their sense of identity and belonging. It could also be potentially life-saving. For many respondents to the national research survey on past adoption practices, the seeking of information about themselves and family members from whom they were separated was one of the biggest barriers. The cost of accessing records also puts considerable additional stress on people who were adopted. One participant said that the cost of accessing information was just too high. It was too expensive. It was also too time-consuming, too stressful and there were just too many closed doors. It also appears to be discriminatory, with adoptive persons having to fork out hundreds of dollars extra on top of the normal cost of obtaining a birth certificate.

Many participants in the national research study also expressed frustration if there are contact vetoes in place with adoptive persons therefore not being able to access medical histories for their biological mother and father. Others said that navigating government adoption systems and red tape was not easy and re-traumatised people all over again, and that the system needed to be made easier for people to use. If you have to search between all state and territory systems the barriers and costs are amplified yet again. I fully believe that a national response is required for many of the issues raised in the national research report and I am therefore pleased that today's apology is only one part of the government's response on this issue.

After the Tasmanian parliamentary inquiry and after thousands of pages of submissions and transcripts of hearings to the Senate committee, the evidence is clear and overwhelming that the removal of babies from their mothers has had a lifelong impact on those mothers and, in a great many instances, on the children. The Senate committee's report details those experiences in the words of these women. I note that many could not contribute to the inquiry because reliving those traumatic events was simply too difficult; others, the Senate was told, had taken their own lives. A great many women found even the process of recollection and recounting deeply disturbing and traumatic. Many women said they had suffered all their lives but they had never forgotten and they had spent their whole lives looking for their children. Others wanted a formal recognition that this was a period in our country's history where mothers were unjustly abused, betrayed and punished.

As a mother of four myself, it is simply heartbreaking to read those submissions, to read how women were immediately separated and were not given the opportunity to hold their babies they had felt growing, moving and kicking inside their bodies for nine months. As well, the shame those women have carried in silence, and the relief of finally being able to talk about this and to get it all out in the open. The pain of knowing you have no choice and no support to enable you to keep your baby. As one mother said, 'I prayed to God every night for Him to send someone to show me a way to keep my baby, but no-one did. It was clear to me that no-one was going to help me'.

I have no doubt whatsoever that today's apology is the right thing to do. The passage of time has not dulled the pain for these women and today we need to acknowledge that, but the passage of time has thankfully changed society's attitudes to unwed mothers. Speaking as someone who was a single mum myself and now, for my own daughter's sake, I know that I for one am truly grateful for that.

I am pleased that this apology is not the only positive recommendation to be adopted from the Senate inquiry as we do need to address the wider issues surrounding access to information, cost for obtaining information, and the rights of children and biological parents to know their medical history. We also need to be mindful that talking and recounting experiences can be very traumatic for those involved and therefore we need to provide the supporting counselling services necessary.

Again, I join with other members of the House in offering my sincere apologies to those affected by past adoption practices. While I know that nothing can make up for the pain of losing a child or a child losing their mother, I am truly very, very sorry for that loss.

**Members - Hear, hear.**

[12.19 p.m.]

**Mr O'HALLORAN** (Braddon) - It is a great honour to stand here today side by side with my fellow parliamentarians and with the Tasmanian community to offer this most sincere apology to the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. We cannot take back what you have lost. We cannot change how you feel and who you have become as a result of your experiences. We cannot simply unpick the patchwork of your lives to erase the memories of the hurt and trauma inflicted upon you.

We can offer you this apology in the hope that it might provide a pathway to healing some of the deep and terrible wounds that you have endured as a result of these past policies and practices. We can offer you support to aid in your healing and to help you move forward. We can educate the community to help foster understanding and empathy to make it known that you have been wronged and that the shame and guilt is not yours to bear. We can and must learn from our mistakes so that atrocities of this nature may never be repeated.

As a former teacher, I now wonder how many children I taught or knew who were forcibly removed from their parents at birth. How many mothers dropping their children off at the school gates each day were masking behind their smiles memories of the precious bundle they lost, the precious bundle they carried through pregnancy, that they loved and nurtured in the womb and who they gave birth to, only to have that precious bundle whisked away from their loving embrace shortly after birth?

How many people I see as I wander down the street spend their lives searching, scanning the faces of babies, children, teenagers and now adults looking for signs, desperate for a glimpse of their lost child? The birthday of their baby is an annual reminder of the heartache and pain that only parents who have lost a child can know. Bonding between mother and child was a policy no-no - no teddy bears allowed.

Since being elected as a member of parliament, I have spoken to many people directly impacted by past forced adoption policies and practices and have been struck by the stark reality that these people have faced - the trauma, the heartache, the pain, the confusion, the loss, the guilt, the shame. I have also been moved by the stories of courage, growth and happiness that have emerged like desert flowers from otherwise difficult circumstances. Stories of reconnection between mothers and fathers, and sons and daughters. Stories of those who have carried with them the burden of secrecy finally feeling that they can share their stories and realise that they were not alone in their experiences. Stories of people who have carried around the burden of shame and guilt for so long suddenly coming to the realisation that they have done no wrong. Stories about mothers working up the courage to tell the world of their experiences and in doing so helping those who have shared similar life stories. Stories of people banding together to fight for justice, for past wrongs to be acknowledged and to be prevented in the future. Stories of people who have been worn down by their experiences over the years since a forced adoption finally seeing some hope offered by this formal recognition today as a result; the slow restoration of their self-confidence and respect. These are among the most poignant human stories I have ever heard.

I heard a story just this morning, for example, from a woman who never knew her mother, who was separated at birth. This is a woman who went into what can only be termed a loose foster care arrangement in which she was subjected to unimaginable trauma and abuse. She gave birth to her own baby, which was forcibly removed at birth; a baby, now an adult, she never saw and to this day never met. The father of that removed baby was either her stepfather or her stepmother's son.

To the average Tasmanian who has not been directly affected by forced adoption, it is very hard to comprehend the full scale of the impacts of these policies and practices. Society at the time was in the grips of a moral code which was ignorant of the realities of the human condition and devoid of any empathy for the mother-child relationship. It is difficult to understand this given the relative maturity of today's society. Until very recently, past forced adoption policies and practices have been enshrouded by secrecy. The very underpinnings of forced adoption policy and practice were about creating secrecy and hiding the truth.

This secrecy has been and continues to be the cause of much of the heartache and suffering that has resulted from

these practices. Secrecy in the locking away of young, unmarried, pregnant mothers in institutions away from the public eye. Secrecy in the prevention of any contact between mother and father once a pregnancy is discovered. Secrecy in the denial of information of rights of parents to keep, love, suckle and nurture and raise their child. Secrecy in the administering of medications to sedate and control parents who were distraught at the loss their child and violently protesting the separation. Secrecy in the telling of mothers that their child had died, when in fact their child was alive and well and being handed to prospective adoptive parents just down the other end of the ward. Secrecy in denying sons and daughters the right to know their true origins, in trying to blot out and rewrite their life stories and, in effect, concealing aspects of their identity. Secrecy in denying these practices occurred and were wrong.

Let today be a final lifting of that veil of secrecy. Allow us to recognise your pain instead of deny it. Allow us to admit responsibility so that your burden of guilt and shame may begin to lift. Allow us to walk with you in your journey of healing and shoulder some of the burden of your troubles. May we talk about and share in your stories so that your history and our history is understood and respected. No longer will we shut away the truth to pretend that it did not happen. We know that this does not work. There are no winners in trying to suppress or hide from the past. We have to ensure that institutionalised fear and guilt is eliminated.

To conclude, I wish to acknowledge the work undertaken by the Premier and the Minister for Children in getting this necessary and long overdue apology underway; also to their advisers and departmental staff, thank you very much. I also wish to thank my executive assistant, Caroline Wootton, who is with us today, for her ongoing commitment and work on this important issue on behalf of the Greens and constituents. I also wish to thank Kath Hughes, our chief of staff.

But of course the main acknowledgement and tribute that must be paid is to the many mothers, fathers and those adopted as children who have been unwavering in their rightful demand for justice. As selected representatives of the Tasmanian community, we have a huge responsibility to ensure that we protect the vulnerable in our society at every turn, because the consequences of trauma experienced by one generation will resurface in subsequent generations. This trauma does not simply disappear. No government should ever come between a mother giving her baby a teddy bear.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[12.28 p.m.]

**Mr WIGHTMAN** (Bass - Attorney-General) - Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Premier. I welcome everybody here today and thank everybody who has spoken in such a heartfelt manner.

We are united today as one to acknowledge a most regrettable aspect of our history, events that have profoundly affected the lives of numerous Tasmanians, and to place on the record that forced adoption practices happened and that they were wrong. To have and raise a child is a gift. That the privilege and joy of parenthood would be forcibly taken from a parent by others is something that is, for me, as a parent, a dad, most difficult to fathom. I cannot begin to imagine the pain this would cause to a mother; to have the opportunity of knowing, nurturing, caring and holding that child taken away from you by others against your will must be truly devastating.

Forced adoptions occurred without consent or consideration for individuals' rights, feelings, wishes or the mother's love for her baby, and without regard for the fact that, in most cases, the mother did not want to give up her baby. Past forced adoptions practices in this state resulted in people being denied the chance to be raised by their natural parents. This must be acknowledged and is deeply regrettable. Mother and fathers were treated in a most disrespectful way. Their rights and the rights of their babies were denied. Decisions were made for women about their lives, decisions that would have long-term and far-reaching impacts on them and their families for generations to come. Decisions were made without consultation and without consent, decisions that did not take account of the rights of these individuals, judgments that were misguided, patronising and very wrong.

I acknowledge that these practices have had a profound impact upon people affected and I sincerely hope that by us acknowledging the truth of what has occurred, this may go a long way to helping individuals find peace.

Each person's experience is unique. For many the experience has involved great trauma. We know that the impact of past trauma can echo through the generations. I sincerely hope that by acknowledging, frankly and honestly, the reality of what has occurred, that this may relieve even in a small way the trauma, anxieties, the hurt and the inner turmoil that may still be felt by people affected. I understand in many cases women were pressured into signing documents relinquishing their parental rights over their child. They were forced to do so without first being informed of their legal rights and options. This was wrong. Mothers were not given the information they were entitled to. They were treated cruelly because they were pregnant and unmarried. This was wrong.

The law now recognises that it would be wrong for a person to be forced to sign a binding agreement of this nature under duress and without fully being informed of their rights and given the opportunity to obtain independent legal advice. All those individuals who have experienced the trauma, heartache, humiliation and grief inflicted by forced adoptions, those who have suffered on their own without support, without choice and without compassion, should no longer have to carry the burden of guilt of the injustice they have suffered.

I have tried to understand the hurt that these experiences have caused and what it must be like for the individuals affected by these deeply regrettable past practices, but I cannot; I have not been through it. All I can do is try to imagine the pain and the hurt, the years of not knowing whether your baby is still alive and what he or she looks like. Many of the women, many of you, were not allowed to hold your baby. Many of you were not allowed to see your baby. Many of the babies have now grown up thinking their mothers and fathers did not want them, did not love them and that they were willingly given away. For too long this part of our history has been denied. The truth has not been told. The very worst thing we can do to those who have suffered as a result of these practices is to shove the past under the carpet and pretend it did not happen, to allow it to secretly haunt the lives of those affected and society as a whole.

Women did have their babies taken from them without their consent. No signing of a document under duress when you do not know your rights, your options, the law, is lawful consent. As a government and as a parliament we look to ensure that new laws and policies protect human rights, and that the rights of the child are paramount. I am confident that we as a society have learned from these mistakes of the past and that the lessons will help us to ensure that these practices are not allowed to happen again.

In conclusion, we are sorry.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[12.34 p.m.]

**Mr HIDDING** (Lyons) - Previous speakers have canvassed the most important matters on this apology today and I acknowledge all the contributions. I stand here today as a husband of 40 years and as a dad and grandad of a now substantial tribe and I would pray that everyone in the world could experience the happiness that I have in that status. Of course I do that in full recognition that a happy family can come in many forms. My happiness is heightened by the fact that, unlike my kids and grandkids, as a migrant family of the 1950s we seven siblings grew up with no grandparents, no uncles or aunts or cousins for most of our lives. It is the undoubted benefit of that biological extended family, for all those within it, that is at the heart of this event today.

I also stand here as an elected member who served on a joint House select inquiry into adoption practices, which finally reported to parliament in 1999. That inquiry changed me as a person and as a member of parliament. At the time the 30 women who made submissions to our inquiry, and some of them are here today, said they wanted a voice to express their pain and our inquiry gave them that voice for the first time in their lives. Many of them now feel that this apology today is important to them and that is completely understandable to me. The only other person still in this parliament who served on that committee is now the President of the Legislative Council, the honourable Sue Smith MLC. She and I spoke recently about the appalling and distressing stories that we were able to encourage from these damaged but still dignified and beautiful people. Some members of the committee admitted to shedding a tear or two after those meetings, as well as the odd sleepless night, and I still have a lump in my throat just thinking about it all.

I drafted this speech and a range of examples of the distressing stories we heard, but I am not going to read them

into *Hansard*, they are already there from 1999, and besides I doubt I could deliver them without losing some composure. These stories were about young girls who were scared and pregnant being pushed around by their well-meaning families. They had no defence and no defender. Their feelings, their fears, their wishes were set aside and ignored. Their stories were also about the realities that were sometimes revealed years later that things had turned out far from 'for the best', which was a saying that these people heard a hundred times in this whole process. They were always patted on the shoulder and told, 'It's all for the best'.

This apology is not just about the timeless inevitability, since just after creation, of young girls falling pregnant. It is about how the family of those girls behaved in those situations, which has led to this day in history in our parliament. Typically in these circumstances the father of the family was furious because of how he felt his family would be judged in his own community. He would take it out on his own wife, who he stupidly believed was responsible for their daughter's morality, and typically he instructed his wife to deal with this shame that had been brought on the family. He said to his wife, 'It is your problem, you fix it'. Too often, at a time when his scared little daughter needed him, he was not there.

It is obvious that the behaviour of the young mum's parents was all about that perceived sense of shame in the community, which appears to have been based on a version of Christian morality but which failed to recognise the grace and redemptive powers of Christ's love for his people, including these young mothers and their children.

Mum realised that very few realistic practical options existed to in fact fix the problem. Any idea that the young daughter could have a child and live with it on their own was out of the question. There were no government programs and most families were on very basic salaries. Conversely, there were a good number of childless couples desperate to adopt a child, as there was no assisted reproductive technology available in those days, nor overseas adoption. The community culture of the day was that you are desperately unhappy to have a child, there are people desperately unhappy not to have one, so the problem is solved. 'We will take your child, you go back to your previous life as though nothing happened and, dearie, it is all for the best'. What were they thinking? It appears that they had little understanding about that deep, unbreakable lifelong spiritual bond between a birth mother and a child, and we as MPs should never forget this unbreakable bond in public policy debates in this parliament. Back then they believed that if the mother did not bond with the child in the first few days any problems would fade with time. Every one of these relinquishing mothers continued to be patted on the shoulder at all points of this process and warmly advised it was all for the best.

As the only member of this House still serving who sat on this joint House inquiry into adoption practices I do need to address some matters of concern to various stakeholders. Firstly, none of the concerns over adoption practices of that time should be attached to any adopting parents. It never is, or was, the wrong thing to do to seek to adopt a child. My heart bleeds for all those orphans in nations around the world who, but for hopeless bureaucracies, could be adopted by one of the thousands of Australian families on a waiting list to welcome such a child with much love and a wonderful life in Australia. Secondly, despite some of the language of this apology today, our inquiry was not able to make any adverse finding against the Catholic Church, the Salvation Army or their agencies, which remain leaders in community service in Tasmania today, nor any public servant or health worker. They were all obliged to work within the community's view of the day that it was for the best for these mums and their babies.

Incidentally, there was some key evidence provided to our inquiry that has convinced me governments should always, where possible, use churches or other community groups to deliver programs which need the application of values and standards to deliver best-practice outcomes. In this case, evidence was provided about an appalling case where a relinquishing mother celebrated her child's birthday every year for many years after the child had passed away. A senior public servant giving evidence to our committee said that, as a government system, it had to be rigid in its rules that there was no contact of any kind between the baby and its biological mother after the adoption took place. When I put the same case to the late Father Clem Kilby of Centacare, he told the inquiry that, regardless of the rules, they would every time contact the biological mother on the death of her child.

In that vein - and in conclusion - I want to thank the Australian Association of Social Workers which, 13 years ago in evidence to our committee, recognised the need to apologise when they told the committee, and I quote:

With the wisdom of hindsight and the awareness of the knowledge, resources and support now available, we believe that in the same situations today the same individuals and professionals would give very different advice. This in no way diminishes the pain felt by the mothers and children who were separated at birth.

Today we join with those social workers in expressing our regret for past practices, the attitudes of society and those mums and kids denied the chance to grow up with and be loved by their biological parents.

More than 30 birth mothers made submissions to our inquiry 13 years ago. To those brave but still hurting women, the many others who have since spoken out to the Senate inquiry and elsewhere, to those who have not spoken out at all and to all those surviving babies who are now adults, on behalf of the community I offer sincere apologies for your painful experiences and may God bless you all.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

[12.43 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Denison - Minister for Human Services) - Mr Speaker, distinguished guests, we stand here today with heavy hearts and joined in sorrow surrounded in this place by the women and adult children who suffered a wrong so terrible and unimaginably cruel that in hearing and reading their testimony we can only begin to understand the depth of their grief and the enormity of their suffering.

The policy of forced adoption broke the hearts of a generation and more of young mothers who had their children ripped away from them, who never saw the faces of their babies and who searched for those faces for the rest of their lives. They were young women whose only crime was to fall pregnant and who were made to pay for that mistake over and over again for the rest of their lives. These women were treated like dirt and sometimes treated like slaves by the state- and church-run institutions they were forced into, either by their parents or the harsh value system of their times. They were spoken to as if they deserved every insult, privation and abuse of their fundamental human rights they received. They were told they did not deserve to keep their babies and that if they loved them they would give them away. They gave birth, sometimes without pain medication, which was withheld as punishment for their sins, with sheets or pillows covering their faces so they could not see the miracle of their baby's birth. They could not hold their babies, could not name them, and could not begin to hope they would be given a chance to love and nurture the child they had given birth to.

These women were not treated with a scrap of respect or compassion, and this was by state charitable and church-run institutions where true charity was in short supply. These charitable and religious institutions, bastions of morality, were engaged in practices that we now know to be illegal and immoral. Some have formally apologised, some have not, and for those who have not, it is well past time they did. These young Tasmanian women were made to feel the deepest shame for falling pregnant outside wedlock, and for that it is we who are ashamed and it is we who say sorry for the agonising hurt these blameless Tasmanian women were made to suffer.

To your children, forcibly taken, stolen and traded away like a commodity, we say sorry. We are sorry that so many of you, from the moment of your birth, were not given a second of the warmth, love and tenderness your mothers had to offer. We are sorry that the first arms you were nestled in were those of a stranger employed in one of the Salvation Army, Catholic, Church of England or state-run institutions where you came into the world, a stranger who likely felt no love for you at all. You deserved that love; it was denied, and many of you will have been searching for it all your lives. We are sorry that many of you will have felt anger towards your mother, blaming her for the enduring, aching sense of rejection that you have suffered; and the anger, too, towards your fathers. You could not have known that you, your mothers and your fathers were all victims of a harsh, judgmental, vindictive practice that spanned the best part of seven decades in Tasmania.

You were all victims, and for that today the Parliament of Tasmania, on behalf of the Tasmanian people, says sorry, and that while we cannot change the past, while we cannot restore the brokenness of your lives, we can say it will never happen again. Small comfort for some, I know, but that pledge must be made.

Not far from where I live in West Hobart is a building that even today speaks of utter misery. The Elim Maternity Hospital, as it was known then, was run by the Salvation Army and it still reeks with sadness. It is a permanent reminder of a long, dark, unhappy chapter in Tasmania's history. Of course for the women whose lives were irrevocably damaged within its walls, and within all those institutions involved in the illegal and immoral forced removal of children, that chapter is without end.

To the mothers, children, the fathers robbed and wronged, we say sorry, and we hope with every fibre of our being that today's apology and recognition of the wrongs inflicted on you bring a measure of relief and of healing. We are so very, very sorry for your lifelong loss and your pain, and let it be known and placed on the permanent public record that you did no wrong at all.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

**Mr SPEAKER** - I would like to indicate that there was a photographer in the press gallery. No one has my permission to take photographs of the gallery today and I ask that person, or anyone else who has taken photographs, to keep in mind the solemn occasion we are dealing with today. They will not be permitted to publish any photographs.

**Motion agreed to *nemine contradicente*.**

**Sitting suspended from 12.49 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.**