

Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group

Communiqué #3

The third meeting of the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group was held in Canberra on 20 March 2014 in Parliament House. The meeting date was scheduled to coincide as closely as possible with the first anniversary of the National Apology to people affected by forced adoptions that was delivered by the former Prime Minister on 21 March 2013. As the meeting date was also the last date for the Autumn Parliamentary Sittings, Working Group members were able to be present during first anniversary acknowledgement speeches in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Representatives from National Archives of Australia (NAA) demonstrated the [Forced Adoptions History Project website](#), which was launched later that day. The website has been developed following consultations and input from with many people affected by forced adoptions. The website will grow over time as more people contribute their experiences.

Working Group members discussed the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) scoping study findings. Feedback on the findings had previously been invited from all forced adoptions stakeholders, which Working Group members were also able to consider. The Working Group will provide formal advice to the Department of Social Services (DSS) on the service model for the specialist forced adoption services. This advice, along with the feedback from all forced adoption stakeholders, will be used to develop the service model. DSS will seek the consent of the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, to open a funding round for providers to apply to deliver specialist support services. DSS is aiming to have these services in place by mid-year.

Representatives from the Department of Health provided an update on the guidelines and training package for mental health practitioners working with people affected by forced adoptions. It was clear from their consultations with clinician peak bodies that mental health practitioners need greater awareness of forced adoption and the impact it has had on people. Mental health practitioners also need information about specialist services that they can refer people to for additional support. This is consistent with the finding of the scoping study. The first stage of the guidelines and training package is likely to be in place within 12 months.

As part of the Working Group meeting members attended the launch of the [Forced Adoptions History Project website](#) (<http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au/>). [Minister Andrews](#) and the Director-General of National Archives, [Mr David Fricker](#), acknowledged the significance of the National Apology for Forced Adoption and the important role the website will place in raising awareness of forced adoption issues.

As part of the launch Minister Andrews unveiled the framed National Forced Adoptions Apology parchment. The parchment will go on display in the Members Hall of Parliament House.

Members of the Working Group attended the House of Representatives where:

- The Prime Minister of Australia, the [Hon Tony Abbott MP](#), made a speech acknowledging the first anniversary of the National Apology and for forced adoptions turning what should have been a wonderful experience of mothering into something that was shameful.
- The Leader of the Opposition, the [Hon Bill Shorten MP](#), also spoke and declared that no Australian should again have to undergo the pain which those affected by forced adoptions endured.

Following the Prime Minister's speech, Working Group members visited the Senate Chamber to listen to speeches by:

- [Senator Mitch Fifield](#) who acknowledged the ongoing pain and suffering caused by the unethical, dishonest and sometimes illegal practices of the past;
- [Senator Rachel Siewert](#) who acknowledged that an apology is only part of the healing process;
- [Senator Carol Brown](#) who reiterated that the mothers loved and wanted their babies;
- [Senator Bridget McKenzie](#) who, speaking on behalf of Senator Sue Boyce, thanked the mothers, fathers and others who told their harrowing stories which paved the way for the National Apology; and
- [Senator Claire Moore](#) who said that the action following on from the National Apology must continue into the future.

The Working Group will meet again in approximately June 2014.