

  
29 April 2022

Committee Secretary  
Legal Affairs and Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into matters relating to donor conception information**

This is my submission to the inquiry into matters relating to donor conception information. I write this letter as a Donor Conceived Person (DCP) conceived in Brisbane in 1981. I give permission for this submission to be published but request that my name and identifying details remain confidential.

**My story**

I was conceived in November 1981 and born in July 1982. I was raised in western Queensland as an only child.

I only become aware that I was conceived using donor sperm three weeks prior to my 38<sup>th</sup> birthday. Two years prior, in August 2018 I was caring for my Dad when I was handed his medical records. When I scanned the records for matters relating to his current condition it became apparent that due to another medical condition it was unlikely he was my biological father. It was so shocking that I could not face the issue and for the next two years discussed it with no one other than my husband and best friend.

On 5 July 2020 while visiting my Mum I asked my her if Dad was my biological father. She admitted that he was not and explained I was conceived using donor sperm. She managed the revelation of this news to me incredibly well given it was such a shock to her. She admitted it was a secret she intended on taking to the grave based on the advice provided by the doctor who facilitated my conception.

That night I returned home and told myself that this changed nothing, that it would be a blip on the radar and that family is who raises us and loves us. I was ignorant, naïve and in shock.

The next day I looked at my face in the mirror and was at a loss as to who I was looking at. The experience was harrowing and not one I would wish on anyone. I now understand that this experience has a term, genetic bewilderment.

The following week was a blur. I ordered an Ancestry DNA kit. I was incapable of work. I disengaged from my husband and children. It became a period of intense research. I watched, listened to and read everything I could find about donor conception. My mother remembered I was conceived in offices on Wickham Terrace in November 1981 and my conception was facilitated by an obstetrician and gynaecologist who I will refer to as 'Doctor'.

Nine days after finding out I was donor conceived I found an online support group for DCP's. I joined and was asked to provide an introduction post to the group. I did as such and mentioned Doctor facilitated my conception. Various members of the group welcomed me, and one woman mentioned she was also conceived at the same clinic that Doctor worked in but by another doctor. She mentioned we could be sisters as the doctors shared sperm donations. Initially I didn't take her seriously but clicked on her profile photo and was shocked to see a face not dissimilar to my own. We started chatting. We shared photos and the resemblance stunned me. On 25 August 2020 the Ancestry DNA results returned confirming that we are half-sisters.

Though finding my half sister I also found my donor. My half-sister searched for 22 years to find him. In 2017, after several intense months of building mirror trees in Ancestry DNA (all stemming from one 4<sup>th</sup> cousin match) she finally found and contacted him. He was absolutely delighted to be found and asked to meet her the next day. Since then more siblings have shown up on Ancestry DNA, including myself. Currently there are six known sisters and three known brothers. Two of these children are my donor's children and were raised by him.

I have since developed a very close relationship with two of my half-sisters. Our families have met several times, we have camped together and had a sister's weekend away together. The similarities between us are incredible. All three of us have shaved our heads to raise funds for cancer, we have similar name choices for our children, all three of us love weight training. One sister and I are even born on the exact same day only hours apart. But it is the values we share that surprise me the most. Quick minded and organised, a tendency towards minimalism and low consumption. Our relationship is easy and an incredible blessing. It is important to note though, that in no way do these relationships detract from the family who raised me. Much like I can love my three children I can simultaneously love my new extended family and the family who raised me.

I have also met my donor once. Talking to him answered so many questions about myself. It was a revelation to see my face and so many of my personality traits and values reflected in another human being I had never met before. As a result, I feel more confident in myself, surer of who I am and why I am the way I am. I can only describe meeting him as profound.

My experience of being donor conceived has largely been positive. Though this is off the back of the heartbreaking search my sister endured for 22 years. She provided me with all our answers and prevented me needing to face a clinic to try and find my answers which I have come to discover is an excruciating experience for most DCPs. To make my situation even better I have been welcomed by two sisters with open arms and met by donor who is happy to talk as I need. However. And this is a big however. The experience has been incredibly traumatic and has changed my life forever.

My donor donated from 1981-1986. One to two times a week, sometimes three. I potentially have hundreds of siblings. In February of this year, another sister turned up on Ancestry DNA. This is the reality for the rest of my life. My family has no limits. I have no idea how many siblings I have or how many cousins my children have. I currently live in Canberra with my husband and children and while our extended family all live in Southeast Queensland (SEQ) it is highly unlikely we will ever move back to SEQ as I am genuinely concerned my children could unknowingly date cousins.

After finding out I was donor conceived I entered a period of grief. I was distraught that my father is not connected to me biologically as I had always believed. I was distraught that the grandparents I thought was biologically connected to are not. I was distraught that I had lost 38 years with my beautiful half-sisters after a lifetime as an only child desperately wishing for siblings. I was distraught that a stranger inhabited 50% of me. It took six months before the

intensity of the grief started to fade. But there are still days where I am overwhelmed by the experience.

In addition to my grief the details around my conception are unsettling. What I know now is that my donor would ride his motorbike into the car park of Doctor's offices and leave his donation on a hidden ledge where he would retrieve a \$20 note (approximately worth \$82 today). Later someone from Doctor's office would retrieve the donation and it would be placed on a shelf in the hallway of the office where the doctors in the office would use the donation to facilitate conception of patients in attendance that day. Quite interestingly my mother clearly remembers she was asked to pay \$50 (approximately worth \$207 today) to cover the donor's costs. At the time she thought this was quite a lot of money to cover the donor's costs but being 23 and desperate for a child she quickly pulled out her cheque book to pay. She was then instructed the payment would need to be made in cash. She was concerned that this payment was occurring 'off the books' but again felt she was in no position to query further so arranged the cash. I'm curious to know what happened to the remaining \$30. Much like I am curious as to what Doctor was thinking when he allowed my donor to donate hundreds of times.

### **Recommendations for legislative reform**

I am very relieved to know that this inquiry is occurring. The Queensland parliament has the power to improve outcomes for DCP. I support the following recommendations which were presented to the United Nations in Geneva during the closing plenary for the 30th anniversary on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 2019:

*"States should create international and national frameworks and laws that:*

1. *Ensure the right of donor-conceived and surrogacy born children to access information about their identity and origins regardless of when these children were conceived and born and to preserve relations with their biological, social and gestational families.*
2. *Ensure that comprehensive and complete records of all parties involved in the conception of the child be held by the State in perpetuity for future generations.*
3. *Respect and promote the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights of donor-conceived and surrogacy-born children in both the immediate and longer terms.*
4. *Ensure that the best interests of the child be the paramount consideration in all relevant laws, policies and practices and in any judicial and administrative decisions. This should include, but is not limited to, pre-conception assessments/screening of donors, intended parents, and surrogates and post-birth follow up/review that upholds the best interests of the child as paramount.*
5. *Prohibit all forms of commercialisation of gametes, children, and surrogates including, but not limited to, the sale and trafficking in persons and gametes."*

In addition to the above I also recommend:

1. the rights of the DCP created are first and foremost in any policy or legislation;
2. consideration be given to the moral and ethical issues surrounding appropriate family limits;
3. retrospectivity for all legislation and registers, similar to what has occurred in Victoria. The increasing popularity of Ancestry.com and other DNA testing sites shows that secrecy

and anonymity can no longer be assured. It is preferable that donor conceived persons learn of their genetic history with counselling services available;

4. access to government counselling for those affected by donor conception, particularly DCP;
5. contact between donor conceived persons and their donor or donor siblings should be by mutual consent, with protections available for any person who does not want contact. This ensures that privacy can be protected whilst lifting the veil of anonymity;
6. legislate parent's telling their children they are donor conceived;
7. cessation of international and interstate gamete importation, gamete donation in other countries is not well regulated and can result in large sibling groups and poor screening for medical issues, it also reduces the chance that DCPs can establish relationships with their biological family;
8. language referring to DCP's in policy and legislation should not be dehumanising (e.g., "product of donor conception" or "offspring") or infantilising terms ("donor baby", or "donor child");
9. very carefully considering what payments are made for donations, just as no money is exchanged for the donation of blood or organs nor should money be exchanged for the donation of gametes; and
10. all fertility clinics or medical professionals in Queensland that practice or have practiced donor conception should be required to handover all historical records to a government-controlled donor conception authority as a matter of urgency. Clinics can not be trusted to retain accurate records or to protect them in perpetuity.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I sincerely hope this inquiry can improve outcomes for DCPs so no future DCPs experience the trauma myself and many other DCP's have experienced.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]