



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 14 November 2007

---

### ADOPTION OF CHILDREN AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2007

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (7.56 pm): I rise to second this disallowance motion relating to the Adoption of Children Amendment Regulation. A 250 per cent hike in Queensland government fees for international adoptions is anti family and anti children. Not everyone is blessed with being able to have children naturally. Some will try IVF, but many find this an arduous and expensive process with no guarantee of success. Unfortunately, adoption has been stigmatised by some ideologues who have made it increasingly difficult to access by their influence upon Labor government policies. Under Labor, the register opens and closes with people left in limbo and overseas children in particular left in the need of good homes, left in orphanages and left without the opportunity of having their own family. Adoption policy in action under this Labor government has been heartless. People look not just at the glib statements; they look to see the actions, and the actions are ones which show increasing difficulties in being able to access these services reasonably and affordably.

There are loving couples who are desperate to have their own families and adoption is often their only hope. Intercountry adoption already costs, as we have heard, between \$15,000 to \$40,000. The \$3,000 hike as proposed is just huge. How dare this government say it is nothing! How dare it say that this is an acceptable fee hike! People get loans to complete their families, but this extra cost is really showing no understanding and no compassion for people who really do have the ability to give good homes to children in need. If Australia truly is the lucky country why does this state of Queensland block children from the right to have access to loving families in this country? We should be able to support them in our community and government should be able to support families who choose to go this way because they have no other option.

A 250 per cent increase is just unsustainable for many families. The government will say that it is only about cost recovery. But as the shadow minister has said, should children really be a commodity? Should they be part of a cost recovery model determined with no transparency by this government and no consideration of fairness or the other social issues for couples that are unable to have children by natural means?

Are children commodities that the government seeks to get its share of as part of some commercial transaction? Ironically, this cost recovery model—or whatever it is that the government has put in place—is one that we find is not applied to many other areas of government. I ask members to look at all the spin doctors the government has—the millions of dollars that the government spends on its own public relations machine. Would the government undertake a cost-benefit analysis of all the money that it spends on public relations and then try to justify it to people in other areas of service in the community? The government does not apply that standard to other areas when it suits it.

Universities pay \$98 per hour for professionals with a PhD and \$68 per hour for those who have a graduate qualification. What sorts of qualifications is the government seeking these people to hold? There is no transparency in the way in which the government has come up with this figure. The figure of \$5,000 divided by \$68 equals 75 hours of home visits and writing up of paperwork—whether or not that is what is going to happen. The figure of \$5,000 divided by \$98 equals 50 hours. Once again, I ask the minister:

where is the transparency in the way in which she has come up with these fees? Has the minister truly considered the impacts that this huge hike is going to have?

As the shadow minister has outlined, this regulation brings in severe increases that will mean that the application and expression of interest fees for all adoption programs will rise from \$53 to \$60. There will be an increase in the assessment fee for the Intercountry Adoption Program from \$2,000 to \$3,500. The government is going to introduce a postplacement supervision fee for the Intercountry Adoption Program of \$1,500. The assessment fee will rise for relative children's adoption from \$146.30 to \$450. Those adoptions enable a child's relative or step-parent to apply to adopt the child. The government will remove the application of \$50 payable by a person seeking information about adopted persons or birth parents. I understand that that change is consistent with the government's policy not to charge citizens for information about their personal affairs.

A former minister recommended that fees rise only in line with rises in the CPI. That was an option that this minister could have taken on board. That was an option that this government could have continued with. But it chose not to. It chose to go for a 250 per cent hike in fees. The government is treating children as commodities and is ignoring the social impacts on those adoptive families and on those children.

A huge petition was tabled in this House by the shadow minister from 3,462 petitioners. An e-petition from over 1,100 petitioners has also been tabled by the member for Bulimba. Ninety-six submissions were received by the minister. But I think most tellingly, when you cut through all the glib statements of the government and the spin that it spews out thanks to all of its non cost-benefit employed spin doctors, you cannot get around the impact and the words of a family.

I will read a letter from a typical family who tell their story about what this increase in fees really means to them, and that is the most important story. The letter states—

We have made many sacrifices over the last decade to establish our family. Just like many other childless couples we attempted and failed many times with expensive infertility treatments that resulted in heartache and financial stress. We made the decision to stop after spending in excess of \$20,000 on IVF.

We sacrificed much and saved every cent we could to afford intercountry adoption. By the time we finalise our second adoption our financial outlay to create our family will be in excess of \$70,000. If it were not for the equity in our house, which we have borrowed from, intercountry adoption would have been beyond our financial capacity.

We are ordinary people holding down ordinary jobs and working extraordinarily hard to assemble the huge sums of money which will allow us to welcome a child born overseas into our families. Most of us have been through IVF—a lot of money and an ocean of tears—all in the hope of realising the dream of becoming a family.

I urge this government to consider the impact that this change will have upon families and to listen to their view. I urge this government to not sell childhood to the highest bidder and to do what is in the best interests of children and families and not price them out of the market owing to its anti-adoption policies. I urge the government to not block the chances of happiness for the most vulnerable, parentless or neglected children from overseas and the families who would love them, care for them and give them a chance at life in this wonderful country. I reject this regulation. I reject the policy of this government. I urge this government to reconsider what is a heartless approach to a desperate situation in our community.