

**Question on Notice
No. 943
Asked on 26 May 2006**

MR G MALONE MP asked the Minister for Child Safety (MR REYNOLDS)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the inter-country adoption programs in which the Department of Child Safety previously indicated that it would participate –

- (1) Why has the inter-country adoption list been closed to any further applications?
- (2) Will he consider re-opening this process to prospective parents that would like to adopt a child from overseas?
- (3) Why is the cost of adopting a child from overseas as high as \$40,000 and what can the Government do to assist in these adoption costs?
- (4) As the adoption list is now closed, what has happened to the unexpended revenue from the allocated annual budget of \$4.56m?

ANSWER:

- (1) In 2002, under amendments made to the *Adoption of Children Act 1964* (the Act) and the *Adoption of Children Regulation 1999*, the process for lodging an application to be assessed as a prospective adoptive parent was changed from an open lodgement process, to one requiring interested parties to respond to an Expression of Interest process. The amendments also require a closure date for the expression of interest to be published when expressions are invited. This was in part due to a waiting list of some 505 couples seeking to be considered for the placement of a child from overseas. Transitional provisions in the Act provided for all applicants on the former adoption lists to be automatically transferred to the appropriate register. The Expression of Interest (EOI) Register and an Assessment Register replaced the then Foreign Children's Adoption List.

In relation to intercountry adoption, the department's primary responsibility is to assist in meeting the needs of children identified by overseas adoption authorities as requiring placement with approved Queensland adoptive families. The procedure for determining when to call for expressions of interest from people seeking to adopt a child from overseas involves consideration of a number of interrelated factors including:

- the number of approved prospective adoptive parent applications requested by an overseas authority;
 - the capacity of the overseas adoption authority to accept applications from approved Queensland prospective adoptive parents;
 - the specific placement needs of children;
 - specific characteristics sought by the department such as, identification with or links with a particular country or ethnic group, previous parenting experience and/or membership of an adoptive family support group; and
 - the operating status of the specific intercountry adoption program.
- (2) I am pleased to confirm that the Expression of Interest Register will again be opened from the start of business on Monday, 3rd July 2006 until close of business on Monday, 2 July 2007.

- (3) In relation to the cost of intercountry adoption, couples wishing to be assessed as prospective adoptive parents pay intercountry adoption fees in Queensland, in addition to the costs associated with the overseas adoption process. The overseas component of the process includes all costs associated with the adoption in the overseas country, legal and translation expenses, travelling to meet their child and accommodation while they are overseas. Total costs vary between \$15,000 and \$40,000 depending on individual countries. The Department of Child Safety has no control over the fees charged by the overseas authorities. Overseas authority fees cover legal processes which need to take place to formalise adoption according to the law of the specific country. Some countries, such as, China and Korea require a compulsory donation which is used to improve child welfare services in those countries.

In relation to the costs associated with the application and assessment process undertaken in Queensland, couples currently pay an application fee of \$53 and an assessment fee of \$2,000. The assessment fee covers only 20 % of the total cost and includes the assessment of the couple and any future post-placement visits. The cost incurred includes the fee paid to the assessment contract worker of \$1,672 (including GST) for the initial assessment. If additional interviews are required with the couple, which regularly occurs, the cost increases by an additional \$110 per interview. If a family is placed with a child by an overseas agency, a further fee of \$187 is incurred for a placement proposal interview.

When a child is placed with a couple, the Department of Child Safety is required to monitor that placement for a 12 month period and provide four post-placement reports during this period to the overseas agency. Each of these reports cost \$253. If siblings or twins are placed with a couple, this cost increases, depending on the number of children.

The application fees contributed by Queensland couples of \$2,053 seeking to be assessed as prospective adoptive parents for a child born overseas are modest compared with other states' application fees such as:

• New South Wales	\$ 9,700
• Australian Capital Territory	\$ 4,265
• Northern Territory	\$ 6,100
• South Australia	\$ 8,200
• Victoria	\$ 6,250

- (4) The annual budget of \$4.56 million is the overall costs of the delivery of adoption services in this State. It includes quality placement services that secure the best possible placements for Queensland children and children from overseas countries who require adoptive families in Queensland. Placement services involve the assessment of the suitability of prospective adoptive parents and the conduct of post placement supervision. Adoption services also include:
- providing counselling and support to people considering adoption to secure permanent care for their child;
 - the release of identifying and non-identifying adoption information to adults affected by past adoption; and
 - maintaining positive and productive working relationships with overseas agencies with which the department works to facilitate intercountry adoption services.

These expenses are ongoing and are not contingent on an expression of interest being called. There is no anticipated unexpended revenue from the allocated annual budget of \$4.56M.