



The Honourable Margaret Keech MP
Member for Albert

Our Reference: PPG00525



**Queensland
Government**

**Minister for Child Safety
and Minister for Women**

20 NOV 2007

Mr N Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Legislative Assembly of Queensland
Parliament House
Cnr Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie *Neil*

Thank you for your letters of 7 September 2007 and 11 October 2007. The letters enclosed copies of three petitions, numbered 896-07 and 885-07 (tabled in the Parliament on 5 September 2007) and 908-07 (tabled in the Parliament on 11 October 2007), concerning proposed changes to fees for intercountry adoption.

At the time the signatures on the petitions were being collected, the Department of Child Safety was conducting public consultation about the government's proposal to make a range of changes to adoption fees. A Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) was released on 3 August 2007 to inform this consultation. Adoption fees had not been reviewed since 2002.

The Government has determined the new fees, after carefully considering all 108 submissions received in response to the release of the RIS.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving the quality of practice, service delivery and timeliness associated with the adoption process.

The total fees for a completed intercountry adoption process will be \$5,060, which includes a new post-placement supervision fee of \$1,500. The total fees for a completed relative adoption process will be \$510. The new fees are those proposed in the RIS and took effect from 29 October 2007, when the register re-opened for couples wishing to express an interest in adopting a child.

The \$50 application fee for an adopted person or birth parent to obtain identifying adoption information from the Department has been removed.

Queensland taxpayers will still be covering around 70 per cent of the program costs for adoption.

For every intercountry adoption finalised in 2006-07, the Department will have spent around \$16,800 to operate the program. The current fees only recover about 15 per cent of this cost to government. The new fees will still only recover about 30 per cent of this cost. This level of subsidy will be maintained in future years by the fees being increased in accordance with movements in the Consumer Price Index from the beginning of each new financial year.

Queensland families will pay significantly lower fees than families from most other states and territories.

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The New South Wales intercountry adoption charge is \$9,700, almost twice the Queensland fee. In South Australia the charge is \$8,512, the Northern Territory is \$6,600 and in Victoria the intercountry adoption fee is \$6,561.

A very clear theme in the public submissions was the unfairness in imposing a post-placement supervision fee for the intercountry adoption program on current applicants, particularly those who had substantially progressed through the process and been denied the opportunity to budget for this additional expense.

I considered the submissions of key stakeholders, including those made at face-to-face meetings and determined that families who had already completed the assessment process should be exempt from the new fees. This means almost one third of current intercountry applicants, including those whose papers have been sent overseas, will not be affected.

The Government will also deliver other concessions to potential adoptive parents.

The expression of interest register for couples interested in adopting a child from Queensland or overseas opened for two years on 29 October 2007. This will enable couples, who are thinking about adoption as a means of forming or adding to their families, to take the next step of registering their expression of interest when it best suits them and when they are truly prepared and ready to do so, safe in the knowledge that the register will be open for some time.

I am also committed to completing the reform of adoption legislation within the term of the current parliament. This review has been ongoing for a number of years and was recently delayed because an inquiry conducted by a federal parliamentary committee raised issues which had to be resolved at the federal level. I am determined to deliver contemporary, child-focussed adoption legislation within the current term of government.

As part of the review, I am keen to consider the merits of returning to a system in which the expression of interest register remains open permanently.

In 2004, it was not unusual for the adoption process to take three years from the time the couple registered their expression of interest until the time their assessment was completed. In 2007, the timeline has reduced dramatically and now couples can expect to progress through the process in 18 to 20 months.

I have asked my Department to commence a review of fees paid to Adoption Contract Workers. These workers are the qualified social workers, psychologists and other professionals who are engaged by the Department to undertake the complex assessment of suitability of applicants to be adoptive parents. The Department has not reviewed contract worker's fees since 2002. I believe if the Department is to retain experienced workers and attract new ones, it is imperative the fees represent a fair payment for the work involved.

Many of the letters received from Members of Parliament on behalf of their constituents asked why many of the clients of the Department do not pay for the services they use and why the fees for local adoption are also not increasing.

The fees for local adoption are not increasing because delivering the local adoption program is part of the Government's responsibility to Queensland children who are not able to live with their families. Whether parents come to the Department, having of their own volition chosen adoption for their child's long-term care, or whether the Department, through its work with the child's family determines adoption is the best way to secure the child's safety and a stable home life, it is the Government's responsibility to these children to find them permanent adoptive families. As such, local adoption is part of the child protection continuum and it is appropriate for the Government to continue to meet the costs of operating the local adoption program.

A new Adoption Practice Manual providing clearer and more transparent guidelines for administering legislation and ensuring contemporary quality practice will be available soon. I know departmental staff and stakeholders are looking forward to its release.

The Department will also improve its delivery of education to prospective adoptive couples through a review of education content and delivery format. The 'Prospective adoptive parent education program' for intercountry adoption is now available in hard copy and will be online shortly. The education program for the general children's adoption program will follow in the coming months.

This initiative will provide greater access to couples who may not be able to attend education workshops, for example people from rural and remote areas to further supplement and improve the provision of education to prospective adoptive couples.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Keech MP
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and Minister for Women
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