

Brief Overview of the History of the Apology Alliance Australia

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The Beginning

When former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised to the Indigenous Stolen Generation in 2008 I felt the time was right to make the nation aware of the 250,000 white babies that likewise had been stolen.

Being in activism since 1994 I was aware that since the 1950s Indigenous babies with white heritage had been stolen by the same adoption agents as our newborns. I believed that this was not a black and white issue, but a crime against motherhood. I wanted to ensure that this shameful part of our history was never repeated.

In 2007 I gathered research for a doctoral thesis that's focus was on the phenomenon of stolen White Australian babies for the purpose of adoption so had a list of groups and individuals around Australia who had participated. So I reached out in February 2008 and asked if they would like to become part of an umbrella group: Apology Alliance Australia, with the focus being on gaining state and federal apologies as well as a national senate inquiry. Many agreed so with their support under the banner of the Apology Alliance I sent out an email to politicians, academics and organisations that I hoped would support our endeavour to gain justice for the generations of white stolen babies and their mothers.

Hence the Alliance was born with this mail out early 2008.¹ I sent the PM a personal letter calling on him to recognise our plight as he had done with the Aboriginal Stolen Generations.²

During our fight for government recognition via apologies we engaged in other, we believed, related injustices that were ongoing and re-traumatising.

Campaign against celebrating Adoption on Mother's Day

In 2008 another galvanising force was the Deborra-lee Furness campaign to promote a US style based adoption system here. Furness' campaign included promoting adoption as an orphan saving venture and to get rid of what she described as Australia's anti-adoption culture. To accomplish this she set up the Orphanangels website, was endorsed by two female politicians and was intent on celebrating

¹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/original-apology-alliance-email-feb-2008.pdf>

² <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/letter-to-pm-rudd-october-2008.pdf>

adoption just after Mother's Day.³ I was inundated with emails from distressed mothers who found Mother's Day a day of loss and mourning. We lobbied our MPs and we all wrote numerous emails alerting those in power of the trauma this was creating amongst mothers who had their babies stolen for adoption.⁴ To want to celebrate an institution that had caused so much pain and to want again reinstate it as a default welfare measure totally contradicted our fight for public recognition of Australia's baby stealing history and our quest to gain apologies and with them healing. In the end the Furness campaign was downgraded to what has become Adoption Awareness Week held in November.⁵ The Alliance had won a small victory. An unexpected consequence was that many more mothers came on board to fight for an apology.⁶

In September 2008 I set up an Apology Alliance IPetition site to garner support for gaining state and federal apologies. The call for a Federal apology was controversial as the Commonwealth stated it played no part in adoptions as they were under state law. I was aware that Indigenous mothers who had their babies stolen under state law had been included in the Federal apology. So I researched more in depth the Commonwealth's role in guiding states on their adoption policy and legislation. This research was invaluable for later gaining the Federal Senate Inquiry and Apology.

Gaining a Mother Representative on the Intercountry Adoption Advisory Panel

A prominent intercountry adoption support group became part of the Apology Alliance and we worked together to urge the Federal government to put a mother onto the Intercountry Adoption Advisory panel. We believed because the panel had 14 adoptive parents and only 2 intercountry adoptees it was biased in favour of promoting adoption. Initially the government did not think an Australian mother who had been separated from her baby by adoption could represent overseas mothers who went through a similar experience. It did not understand that a mother and infant separated whether in Australia or abroad are both traumatised.⁷ Meg Lewis, formerly President of ARMS (SA), Alliance member, started the campaign to get a mother representative on the Intercountry Adoption Advisory Panel which was run under the auspices of the Federal Attorney General's Dept.⁸ Lynelle Beveridge, President of the Inter-Country Adoptee Support Network (ICASN), joined the Alliance and was also a

³ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/anti-celebrate-adoption-week-campaign-april-2008.pdf>

⁴ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/a-sample-of-emails-sent-to-furness-and-politicians-to-stop-the-celebration-of-adoption-of-mother1.pdf>
<https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/response-from-ags-dept.pdf>

⁵ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/celebrate-now-awareness-and-date-changed.pdf>

⁶ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/more-mothers-joining-the-alliance-1.pdf>

⁷ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/final-revision-the-broken-bond-11-11-2011.pdf>

⁸ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/alliance-members-lobbying-for-mother-rep.pdf>

strong advocate for a mother Rep.⁹ So eventually after many emails and phone calls to the Federal AG's Dept a compromise was made. The government would accept a mother who now lived in Australia, but had her child adopted before arrival.¹⁰ The outcome was that a mother who had given birth in another country was offered a place on the panel a year after our 2008 campaign began in late September, 2009.

Educating the community on the dangers inherent in adoption

In particular I worked with Lynelle Beveridge on alerting the government to the trafficking, kidnapping and black markets operating under the guise of intercountry adoption. Lynelle disseminated the Alliance emails amongst her more than 1,000 members as I did amongst other Alliance members and politicians which highlighted the inherent corruption in overseas adoption.¹¹ I believe that our endeavours put the breaks on what was starting to look like it could become open slather on bringing thousands of overseas children here for adoption.¹² Many adoptees felt they had a right to speak out about how they were being "marketed as orphans" and the promotion of intercountry adoption generally.¹³

Even though pro adoption legislation and policy, particularly in NSW was introduced, mothers and adoptees have been extraordinarily effective in bringing the inherent abuses in adoption to the awareness of politicians and the public alike.

I edited and wrote most of the book titled, *Releasing the Past: Mothers' Stories of their Stolen Babies*. I was able to promote the book via the Apology Alliance. The book was launched at the ninth Adoption Conference held in September 2008 by Mr. Patrick Rogan, former MP for East Hills and a pivotal player in obtaining the NSW Inquiry into Past Adoptions (1998-2000).¹⁴ I used the occasion to announce the official launch of the Alliance's campaign to gain justice for mothers and adoptees via apologies.

⁹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/commencement-of-campaign-to-find-mother-rep-for-intercountry-adoption-panel.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/sa-arms-fight-for-mother-rep.pdf>

¹¹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/corruption-in-international-adoptions-new-website-lynelle.pdf> ;
<https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/intercountry-collaboration.pdf>

¹² <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/fighting-child-trafficking.pdf>

<https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/parallels-in-intercountry-adoption-and-domestic-20th-century-41-pgs.pdf>

¹³ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/intercountry-adoptees-speak-out-against-furness-pro-adoption-campaign.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeLt06ftNUU>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K486CcAxROc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEbsONRHQoA>

In an article written for the Post Adoption Resource Centre newsletter *Branching Out*, Barbara Maison documented the first two years of achievements of the Alliance and noted that an important catalyst for mothers' fight for justice was the release of the book as it exposed the illegal and brutal methods utilised to forcibly take newborns from their mothers. Purposely imposed shame and guilt had kept many mothers silent for decades. Barbara also acknowledged the importance of joining all the various support groups around Australia under one umbrella and the power that had to create change.¹⁵ Adoptees also found the book inspiring as it opened their eyes to the brutality perpetrated on their mothers to steal them and to the efforts mothers had made fighting on their behalf.¹⁶

In October 2008 on behalf of the Alliance I emailed the Prime Minister¹⁷ and all Attorney-Generals, State and Federal.¹⁸ We called for a National Senate Inquiry and demanded justice for mothers. I described the distress mothers were feeling at the ongoing pro adoption campaign and attached to the email an article that outlined the parallels between historic forced adoption and current intercountry adoption.¹⁹ One of the key devises to gain apologies was to educate those in power about our suffering and that of others in similar circumstances. "Making it quicker, easier and cheaper for couples to adopt" was about meeting the needs of adults and eerily similar to the propaganda campaign – "unwanted babies in need of saving" - we had lived through in the 1960s that had normalised and promoted the use of forced adoption for the benefit of infertile couples.

In response to the Furness pro adoption awareness week in November one of our members took out an add in *The Australian* titled 'Declaration of Profound Loss', in which support groups and organisations around Australia were happy to be listed.²⁰ Thousands of emails were written to politicians around the country via Alliance members and by myself on behalf of the Alliance.²¹ The education program was paying off the Federal Attorney General's Dept acknowledged that they were listening to those affected by past adoptions in Australia and wanted our input.²²

The First Apology

¹⁵ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/brief-history-of-the-alliance-achievements-as-of-september-2009.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/adoptees-support-for-motherss-book.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/letter-to-pm-rudd-october-2008.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/email-federal-attorney-general.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/attorney-general-cond-letter-sent-out-22-10-20081.pdf>

²⁰ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/declaration-of-profound-loss-2008.pdf>

²¹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/educating-the-politicians.pdf>

²² <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/alliance-campaign-impacts-on-ags-intercountry-adoption-program.pdf>

The Apology Alliance was by 2009 well placed to make the most of the achievements of one of our member groups: Adoption Loss Adult Support (ALAS) Queensland. Professor Ian Jones of the Royal Brisbane Hospital became the first prominent person representing an institution to apologise to four mothers for the theft of their newborns, three from his hospital and one, a Queensland, who had been sent to NSW, and had her baby stolen from a hospital there before being transported back across the border.²³ Alliance members around Australia joined forces to make the country aware that the same injustices perpetrated on the ALAS mothers to gain their babies happened to them in their home states. In this way the teamwork of the Alliance utilised the ALAS apology to ignite a media storm that went national. The apology to ALAS was later followed by another from Professor Ian Jones. This time to adopted persons for being stolen from their families. It was given to a newly formed member group of the Alliance, WASH (White Australian Stolen Heritage), founded by adoptee Kerry Saint. This, as far as I am aware, is the first apology every received by non-Indigenous adoptees forcibly taken from their mothers/families for the purpose of adoption.

Achieving State Apologies

If the Alliance had not been set up Professor Jones' apology would have remained a state based issue. Trish Large, President of ALAS, approached me about speaking to the media and getting the word out about this first and historical apology. The Alliance was able to build on the Professor's achievement.²⁴ The momentum though seemed to stop at the border of West Australia. I had done two interviews with Sarah Cummings for Channel 7 and asked if she had a colleague who would be willingly to meet with some WA mothers and so help the push for the apology in that state. I had previously received correspondence passed to me from an Alliance member regarding Sue Macdonald and her local MP, David Templeman, who had started to work together to bring the issues of stolen white babies to the attention of the WA Government. I passed on this information to Sarah. Cummings' colleague contacted a number of organisations one of which contacted Sue.²⁵ Sue goes into detail about the gaining of the WA apology in the *Australian Journal of Adoption*.²⁶ Sue was interviewed along with another mother and the outcome was major. Shortly thereafter I reached out to Sue who then began a group with a number of like minded WA women under the banner of Mothers for Justice. The Alliance wrote copious emails and did as Sue asked "kept up the pressure". I had been contacting the Greens, in particular Senator Rachel Siewert from the Alliance's inception. I sent copious research to Sue, David, Rachel and then I was contacted by Allison Xamon MP and Senator Louise Pratt. I sent them information along with having many one on one phone calls.

²³ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/the-first-apology-alas-1.pdf>

²⁴ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/apology-alliance-working-together-to-bring-national-attention-to-alas-apology.pdf>

²⁵ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/sue-macdonalds-interview-brings-wa-into-media-surge1.pdf>

²⁶ <http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/aja/issue/view/150/showToc>

David Templeman stood up in parliament, February 2010, and made an impassioned plea for the government to apologise to Sue and other WA mothers for tearing their families apart. The Minister for Health, Dr. Kim Hames promised to apologise. Daniel Emerson, a journalist with the *West Australian*, ran a number of articles. Daniel contacted me and I supplied him with the research he needed to really pressure the government. Daniel was a man on a mission and continued to knock on Dr. Hames's door asking when was he going to give the apology to the mothers as he had promised.

The Greens demanded that the Premier of the State, not Dr. Hames, be the one that delivered the apology. Finally on the 19th October, 2010, the WA Government became the first, not only in Australia, but the world, to issue a formal apology for its policy of forcibly removing newborns from unwed white mothers for the purpose of adoption by married couples. Additionally the stolen children, now adults and other affected family members were apologised to. The Alliance's success was acknowledged by ALAS²⁷ and I received countless emails from other Alliance members celebrating our achievement and in particular stating their gratefulness to the WA mothers and their politicians who had been so tenacious fighting for justice on our behalf. The importance of this apology cannot be overestimated, mothers travelled from all over Australia to witness this historic event.²⁸

When David Templeman stood up to give his apology speech he was able to call on the Commonwealth Government to apologise because I on behalf of the Alliance had furnished him with research that supported this assertion.²⁹ His public acknowledgment of the Commonwealth's involvement in a national policy of forcibly removing the newborns of unwed mothers gave the leverage needed for Senator Rachel Siewert to call for a National Apology and when that was rejected a National Senate Inquiry. The motion for the Inquiry passed.³⁰

The Senate Inquiry was chaired by Senator Rachel Siewert and the committee gathered an enormous amount of data that supported mothers' claims of abuse, the theft of their newborns and the life long damage this caused mothers and their taken children. Meanwhile the Australian Institute of Family Studies, due to lobbying by Alliance members for an apology, had been tasked to do a scoping study and gather evidence about the mental health damage to mothers, adopted persons and other affected family members. The Alliance was in constant contact with key researchers Dr. Daryl Higgins and Pauline Kenny. Dr. Higgins initial Report was released in 2010 the same year as our first apology and their much larger Report was released in 2012 also the same year the Senators handed down their findings. No longer was this shameful part of history going to lay buried under lies and bureaucratic spin.

²⁷ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/finally-our-first-state-apology.pdf>

²⁸ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/australian-journal-of-adoption-formation-of-the-apology-alliance-barbara-maison.pdf>

²⁹ https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/sub_223_supp5-commonwealth-pop-policy.pdf

³⁰ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/short-history-of-the-apology-alliances-team-effort-towards-achieving-state-and-federal-apologies-supported-by-hansard-and-emails.pdf>

All the apologies were hard fought for by the Alliance members. Not only did we receive opposition from those with an interest in keeping this buried, but mothers of one particular group, believed that only taking criminal action against the perpetrators would suffice. This however, was not an option that was on the table. So the strategy of the Alliance was always to educate society and the politicians about this shameful history via the media attention gained by the apologies and by engaging with the Senate Inquiry and the AIFS researchers. The Alliance members believed a public acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the State was imperative to our healing. The Federal Apology given by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard on March 21st, 2013, on behalf of the Australian Government and its people was an historical event treasured by Alliance members.³¹ I spontaneously hugged the Prime Minister when she came down from the podium and sobbed stating: “I have waited forty years to hear those words”. The Apology was just as amazingly healing as I thought it would be.

The Fight is not over: Implementing practical measures

The Apology Alliance is now engaged in ensuring that the practical measures that are part of the apology process are continued. I have set up the Apology Alliance Australia Blog³² and continue to keep members informed via the Blog and the Alliance email list. Recently one of the Alliance members, Kerry Saint, formerly of (WASH) now founding member and President of the Association of Adoptees Australia and I as Convenor of the Alliance presented papers at the NSW Parliament House.³³ Jan Barham Greens MP, with whom the Alliance has been in constant contact since prior to the NSW apology, made a motion that there should be an annual remembrance day for survivors of Forced Adoption and that the government pay for a memorial.³⁴ Ms Barham’s motion can be viewed on YouTube.³⁵ This motion was passed on the 11th September, 2014 and we were asked to speak to NSW parliamentarians a week later on the need to continue to educate the community about Forced Adoption, the ongoing need for trauma services for those affected, and the right of adopted persons to hold an Integrated Birth Certificate. One that truthfully reflects their birth status so includes the names of their mother and father not just their adoptive parents. The Alliance has also continued to lobby MPs about the need for the NSW government to release the 303 submissions given by mothers at the NSW Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices (1998-2000) that have been suppressed by the NSW government. Jan Barham has made a motion on our behalf for the suppression order to be lifted. These stories should be part of the national history of Forced

³¹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/bella-pm-chris.jpg>

³² <http://apologyalliance.com/>

³³ <http://apologyalliance.com/2014/10/16/kerri-saints-presentation/>
<http://apologyalliance.com/2014/09/24/my-talk-event-to-commemorate-the-passage-of-a-motion-for-memorial-and-recognition-day-of-nsw-forced-adoption-apology/>

³⁴ <http://apologyalliance.com/2014/10/16/hansard-transcript-from-legislative-council-11-september-2014-motion-for-day-of-recognition-memorial/>
<http://www.janbarham.org.au/?s=Forced+adoptions&x=0&y=0>

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o55d4fPCJ2A>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqPkVgKBEcc>

Adoption and Alliance members believe they should be part of the National Archives Forced Adoption History Project.

Many are still unaware that there were state and federal apologies. Many adoptees are only now becoming aware of the truth that they were stolen and not abandoned. The education of our community for the sake of our children and grandchildren must continue.³⁶

The Alliance continues to campaign against the reintroduction of Forced Adoption as a default welfare measure for vulnerable families. A phenomena particularly prevalent in NSW. I have written a formal complaint on behalf of the Alliance to the Australian Human Rights Commission in which I argue that by reintroducing Forced Adoption the NSW and Federal Governments are violating the promise they made as part of their apology that Forced Adoption would never again happen in Australia.³⁷ The complaint has also been submitted to the present inquiry into children in out of home care chaired by Senator Rachel Siewert along with recent research I conducted on the out of home care industry under the title: *A Stolen Generation in the Making*.³⁸

The above is only a few of the many achievements of the Apology Alliance since its inception in February 2008. There is so much more to do.

Excerpts of the Apology Given by the ACT Government:

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Health and Minister for Territory and Municipal Services) (10.02), by leave: I move:

DAILY HANSARD
Edited proof transcript
14 August 2012

Forced adoption—apology3067

*I would like to acknowledge the work done by the Apology Alliance, which, in arguing for a national inquiry and an apology, has played such a leadership role in forcing us all to face up to this dark chapter of our past. And thank you again to the many men and women who have, through their own stories, written that chapter into our official history books at last. To all those affected by forced adoption, please accept this apology in the spirit in which it is offered.*³⁹

³⁶ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/releasing-the-past-mothers-stories-of-their-stolen-babies-knowing-the-truth-empowers-adoptees.pdf>

³⁷ <http://apologyalliance.com/about/australian-human-rights-commission-letter/>

³⁸ <http://apologyalliance.com/a-stolen-generation-in-the-making/>

³⁹ <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/vol-i1.pdf>
<https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/vol-ii.pdf>