

# Despatch BOX



## PREVIOUS ISSUE: DECEMBER 2012

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PAINFUL LEGACY: *Lifelong hurt from forced adoptions*

## PARLIAMENT APOLOGISES FOR FORCED ADOPTIONS

The Australian parliament has apologised on behalf of the Australian people for the policies and practices of the recent past which led to mothers being forced to give up their children for adoption.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard led the apology, saying government departments, churches and charities, medical staff, families and society as a whole shared responsibility for the “shameful practices”.

“Today, this parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering,” Ms Gillard said.

During a 50 year period leading up to the early 1980s, social stigma and outright coercion led thousands of mothers to give their children away.

Ms Gillard said most of the women who lost their children were young and vulnerable.

“They were often pressurised and sometimes even drugged,” she said.

“Too often they did not see their baby’s face. They couldn’t sooth his first cries. Never felt her warmth or smelt her skin.

“They could not give their own baby a name.”

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott joined his voice to the apology, expressing personal regret for not adequately supporting a loved one who was pressured into adopting out a child.

“The late Kathy Donnelly was a beautiful person and a fine mother who loved all her children,” Mr Abbott said.

“She deserved nothing but love and support, not coercive expectations, social stigma and – I say this with more than a pang of personal guilt – men in her life who had failed to live up to their responsibilities.”

The apology was made in the Great Hall at Parliament House in Canberra on 21 March 2013, supported by a motion moved in the House of Representatives and Senate.

Members and senators from all political persuasions contributed to the apology, with many sharing heartbreaking stories of loss, abuse and resilience.

Debate on the motion will resume during the winter parliamentary sittings beginning in mid-May.

## NEXT EDITION

This issue of *About the House* will be the last before parliament is dissolved for the federal election, scheduled for 14 September 2013. We look forward to returning once the new parliament is formed.

You can find out more about the election process and the operation of the parliament during the caretaker period in the Question Time and House Rules sections of this edition (pages 56 and 57).