

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 18 July 2012

The **SPEAKER (Hon. L.R. Breuer)** took the chair at 11:01 and read prayers.

**The SPEAKER:** Honourable members, I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of this land upon which this parliament is assembled and the custodians of the sacred lands of our state.

### STATUTES AMENDMENT (NATIONAL ENERGY RETAIL LAW IMPLEMENTATION) BILL

**The Hon. J.R. RAU (Enfield—Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Business Services and Consumers) (11:02):** I move:

That the sitting of the House of Assembly be continued during the conference with the Legislative Council on the bill.

Motion carried.

**The SPEAKER:** Honourable members and members of the gallery, I remind people that they are not to take photographs during the proceedings today. Filming is being done and it is being streamed, and a DVD will be available afterwards. I would ask you not to take any photographs; it is not a practice in this house.

### STANDING ORDERS SUSPENSION

**The Hon. J.W. WEATHERILL (Cheltenham—Premier, Minister for State Development) (11:02):** I move:

That standing orders be so far suspended as to enable me to move a motion in relation to past adoption practices without notice.

**The SPEAKER:** There being an absolute majority present, I will accept the motion. Is it seconded?

**An honourable member:** Yes, ma'am.

Motion carried.

### PAST ADOPTION PRACTICES

**The Hon. J.W. WEATHERILL (Cheltenham—Premier, Minister for State Development) (11:03):** I move:

That this house recognises that the lives of many members of the South Australian community have been adversely affected by adoption practices which have caused deep distress and hurt, especially for mothers and their children, who are now adults.

We recognise that past adoption practices have profoundly affected the lives of not only these people but also fathers, grandparents, siblings, partners and other family members.

We accept with profound sorrow that many mothers did not give informed consent to the adoption of their children.

To those mothers who were denied the opportunity to love and care for their children, we are deeply sorry.

We recognise that practices of our past mean that there are some members of our community today who remain disconnected from their families of origin.

To those people adopted as children who were denied the opportunity to be loved and cared for by their families of origin, we are deeply sorry.

To those people who were disbelieved for so long, we hear you now; we acknowledge your pain, and we offer you our unreserved and sincere regret and sorrow for those injustices.

To all those hurt, we say sorry.

We meet here today in this special sitting for two principal purposes: first, to recognise that forcible adoption practices caused deep distress and hurt to many South Australian mothers, their children and families; second, to apologise for those practices which we cannot condone. In formal terms, this will become a resolution of the House of Assembly but, in terms of what everybody can see here today, members of both sides of the houses of parliament are gathered here today to be part of this event. We can be sure that when the Legislative Council sits later it will join in formally

adopting this apology. The apology will then be in all ways an expression of the whole parliament—formal as well as visible.

We should pause for a moment to remind ourselves that not everyone who has been separated from a family member by adoption feels that an apology is necessary in their circumstances. We acknowledge their experience and the validity of their feelings. We also know that, in offering this apology, we may be reviving for some people old and half-forgotten memories and emotions from a past time, but we hope that what we are doing here today will in time provide a release from the need to keep these things buried.

The immediate stimulus for the apology has, of course, been the report provided earlier this year of the Senate's Community Affairs References Committee's inquiry into former forced adoption policies and practices, but that committee inquiry was itself preceded by many years of dedicated advocacy on behalf of all of those who had been wronged.

The committee mostly examined people's experiences of forced adoptions which happened between the 1950s and the late 1970s, and this plainly affects many South Australian families. It is estimated that in South Australia 17,000 children were adopted between 1950 and 1980. Some adoptions were conducted within the state welfare department as well as in state hospitals, such as the Queen Victoria Hospital. We also know that many adoptions occurred with the involvement of churches and non-government agencies.

It is not clear how many of the adoptions during this period may have involved coercion or forced removal of a child; what is clear is that many families were deeply affected by the past practices of that kind. It would be fanciful to imagine that the practices of forced adoption revealed by the Senate committee were confined to the precise period covered by the information it was able to gather, so our apology today is not in any sense restricted to the period for which the Senate committee gathered its details. Our apology today extends to all past forced adoptions, whenever they may have occurred.

That said, the committee's report makes harrowing reading. The report tells us that often mothers were rushed into signing adoption consent forms before they had time to recover from the immediate effects of giving birth. Some women were never even given adoption consent forms to sign. In some cases, women's signatures on adoption consent forms were simply forged. Mothers were told that their babies had died when in fact they had already been placed for adoption.

During the 1960s, all states legislated to give mothers up to 30 days to revoke their consent to adoption. Even then, the committee found, this right was disregarded. Sometimes mothers were not even told about it; other times they were told lies. If a mother discussed her wish to change her mind, she might be told it was too late. Mothers were told their children had already been adopted when this was not true.

More subtle coercion was also used in a variety of ways. Mothers were made to feel that consenting to their child's adoption was the only responsible and unselfish thing to do. After being separated from her child in these ways, a mother might be advised to forget what had happened, to never speak of it again, to 'go home and get on with your life'.

Later, I was told yesterday, a mother might be criticised for having, in the eyes of her critic, let her child go. So these mothers were held to be wrong to have become pregnant, then wrong to want to keep their own child, and then wrong for having given way in the face of all of the forces pressing for them to be separated. We reflect sadly on the burden these women have carried, the silence they have endured.

These adoption practices were the product of multiple failures. They failed to meet a basic standard, whether or not they were in accordance with the law at the time. They reflected a failure to apply a simple test of human conduct—a test which we should all try to apply to ourselves every day. They reflected a failure to ask what has become a famous question: how would I feel if this were done to me? For those failures, and for everything they led to, we are sorry.

When I announced our commitment to making this apology, I asked that the Minister for Education and Child Development engage with community groups and the people most affected by these past practices. We knew that our task was to gain an understanding from them about what form this apology should take to have true meaning for those to whom it was to be given. Many mothers, sons and daughters stepped forward, sharing their personal histories. They generously gave us a window into their hearts to understand the effect of forced adoption—the pain of their

loss, their grief for what had been, their grief for what was, and their grief for what should and might have been the wonderful relationship.

Mothers revealed their birth experience was often frightening and lonely. Sometimes, as I was told yesterday, people whose job it was to assist at the birth were, in fact, openly hostile and disapproving. Many mothers told of being immediately pressured to place their child for adoption. They remembered being deprived of any opportunity to determine what was in their and their child's best interests. Some were denied what one might regard as a simple decency—simply to say goodbye.

Children who are separated from their mothers and placed for adoption have, as adults, shared their experiences of being separated from their family of origin and of learning that this had not been voluntary. This wrong practice denied them the opportunity to be cared for by the parents who brought them into the world—and the opportunity to be loved by them and attached to them. Some have had to grow up believing that they were rejected by their mothers. They were denied access which they might otherwise have had to their identity and their history. They were deprived of contact with their heritage. Indigenous children were denied their relationship with culture and country.

Many fathers were denied access to their children. Too often, as a result of pressure, the father was not even recognised on the child's birth certificate. This is a source of anger for children who now know their fathers and want their heritage acknowledged. But some fathers will perhaps never know the son or daughter who was adopted. We acknowledge the wrongs that led to the loss of these relationships. We recognise that fathers also lost their children.

There are countless others—siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents—whose lives have been profoundly affected by these past practices. They, too, have lost relationships. Then there are some, no longer with us, for whom this apology comes too late. We know that some mothers took their own lives as a result of the grief of forced separation. Others also died without ever knowing anything about the child they had lost to forced adoption. I hope this day, this recognition of their hurts, provides some comfort for those who mourn them.

So we apologise, and we do more than that: we recognise, too, the great fortitude of many of those who were most painfully affected. I think particularly of the women who, when young, were separated from their children in these wrong ways. Many of them have skilfully and lovingly built and maintained important relationships in their lives despite all of this. They have done this while living with the painful knowledge of what they have gone through. Often, they have kept this knowledge private. We applaud their resilience and their moral courage.

We also express our determination to ensure that such things never happen again. Our present laws and practices are far removed from those which give rise to this apology. Even so, we remain open to continuing suggestions for ways in which things can be further improved. We also commit to maintaining government financial support for the Post Adoption Support Services provided by Relationships Australia. People are entitled to this continuing support.

We apologise for the lies, the fear, the silence, the deceptions. We apologise for the lack of respect, the disbelief, the grief, the trauma and loss. We offer this unreserved apology not just as an act of atonement but as an expression of open-hearted admiration and support for those to whom it is owed. I commend the motion to the house.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs REDMOND (Heysen—Leader of the Opposition) (11:15):** I rise to second the Premier's motion on forced adoption practices and would like to begin by briefly acknowledging and commending the efforts of the shadow families and communities minister, John Gardner, for bringing the matter to the attention of the South Australian parliament.

Over the past 12 months, members of the opposition have been approached by a number of advocates for this apology. Their stories have moved us all. As soon as the Senate committee of inquiry into this matter was resolved, shadow minister John Gardner brought a very strong recommendation to the Liberal Party that we should encourage the South Australian parliament to apologise without delay and in a bipartisan manner. I am grateful that the government has seen fit to agree to this process we are undertaking today.

Most of all, today is about the mothers, the adoptees and their families, who have been negatively affected by past adoption practices in some South Australian institutions. For those of us who have grown up with our mothers by our side, it is impossible to even begin to imagine how life

might be without that presence, without a mother's guiding hand, and without a mother's unconditional love. For too many of those who have been robbed of this relationship life has been one long, hard and lonely trudge through infancy, childhood, adolescence and into adulthood, wearing a mantle of sorrow and shame that for so many has been impossible to shrug off, and for the mothers often a profound sense of loss and emptiness, guilt and worry—because a mother never, ever stops worrying about her child.

Many of these adoptees were, of course, raised and nurtured in loving homes by parents who did their very best to provide for their every need. In no way must their contribution be dismissed or ignored. They often provided exceptional homes and lives, and this apology should not be seen in any way as questioning or lessening the gift they gave those babies through childhood into adulthood.

For me, as a mother, what is unimaginable is the pain and suffering of the mothers who were made to feel ashamed, and often tricked or bullied into signing adoption papers, and then forced to give birth—sometimes even drugged and tied to the bed during delivery—without so much as a fleeting glance at the precious life being ripped away. These women were young, frightened and vulnerable. They were often far away from their families and in circumstances so unthinkable now, sent away before they began to 'show' and returning after birth, forced to pretend nothing at all had happened.

They needed support and understanding. Instead, their small voices were drowned out by big authorities and governments claiming to act in the best interests of mother and child when, clearly, what they were really doing was quite the opposite: depriving them of basic human decencies and robbing them of basic human rights.

However well intentioned the authorities were, their practices are now recognised as inhumane at best and barbaric at worst. Both sides of this house were complicit in this appalling practice, which is focused on the 1940s and 1950s but, to be honest, began before this time and stretched into the sixties and the seventies, and even beyond. I remember it happening to girls when I was still leaving school. Falling pregnant out of wedlock was looked upon as possibly the greatest shame that could be visited upon a family.

Taking these babies and forcing these adoptions was unethical, immoral and in many instances illegal and, as a mother of three children, I find the brutality and sheer inhumanity of all that has happened quite difficult to accept. I read through some of the submissions made to the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, and I have one with me today. The name has been withheld but it is written by an adoptee, a person now middle-aged, who, after much searching, has finally found her birth mother. If I may, I would like to read a small and particularly poignant excerpt:

The day we first met, we sat in her lounge room and spoke at length but I could make little sense of anything she said. The words were bouncing around my head. I was entranced by the movement of her face and the music of her voice and nothing else would penetrate my mind. This strange experience went on for two days before clearing so that I could converse as an adult. I later realised that this was a necessary resumption of the infant's gaze at the mother, part of the developmental bonding. Fifty years later, I briefly resumed the task of being a baby.

The lifelong anguish and suffering is palpable, and there are thousands, indeed, tens of thousands of stories just like this; stories showing time after time that adoptions have ripped away at that profound bond between mother and child, leaving broken hearts that are unable to heal and emotional scars impossible to hide.

The Liberal Party recognises the value of an apology, that the simple act of saying sorry can help heal. It is a small word capable of huge powers and while it will never right a wrong and it will never rewrite history, it can have a real value for the mothers, the adoptees and the people who love them. The hurt, the trauma, the profound sense of loss and the degradation cannot be undone but we can as a modern government in a modern society acknowledge the truth and apologise for the wrongs done.

As Leader of the Opposition I am pleased to second the motion of apology on behalf of the parliament for the role that the state of South Australia has played in causing this suffering, suffering felt by the mothers who were robbed of their babies cruelly and callously, and the dreadful decades of silence that they have been forced to endure and the suffering felt by the adoptees, denied the most basic right of all, the love of their mothers. We are sorry. I commend the motion to the house.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!

**The Hon. G. PORTOLESI (Hartley—Minister for Education and Child Development) (11:21):** It is with deep respect that I rise in this house today to express my enormous sorrow to each one of the women and men who have been affected by forced adoption practices from our past and, in doing so, I very gladly set aside the normal politicking that goes on in this place.

I express my sorrow to those of you here in this parliament on this day, to those who are watching this apology online through the live stream broadcast, in our regional communities, at home, at the Post Adoption Support Services at Relationships Australia here in Adelaide, and elsewhere in our state and beyond our borders. I express my sadness for those who have since passed away before they could hear these words of apology.

It has been harrowing to hear of the lasting effect that those practices from our past have had on each of you: the pain, the grief, the loss, the anger, the hurt. I believe that it is a fundamental human right of mothers and fathers to be parents to their children and that children have the fundamental right to be cared for and loved by their parents.

This respect for family, the nurture of children and the preservation of family goes right to the heart of our society and our government's beliefs about what matters most. In that respect, that is why this day of apology to those affected by forced adoption is so important for everyone in our community, and yet if we look at the distress caused by forced adoption practices of the past, especially to mothers and to the women and men who were adopted as children, we see that those basic rights were overlooked or simply not considered. That has left a legacy of loss and pain.

I would like to speak briefly about what mothers have told me of their experiences and that legacy of loss and pain because in listening to those experiences—and I have to say I feel enormously privileged to hear these stories—we gain a little insight into the terrible circumstances and the lack of choices that mothers faced at that time in our past: that sense of being trapped in a no-win situation where mothers felt that they were forced to place their child for adoption at a time in our history when mothers struggled with blame and shame; that sense of living with a secret which had to be borne in silence and, for some, still is even after all these years; and that sense of not feeling like you belong, the legacy of loss and pain and emptiness has cast a long shadow, a yearning for what could have been and should have been.

Mothers told me of their feelings of shame and loss. I recall one mother who told me, 'I had an unwanted pregnancy, not an unwanted child.' Some were sent far away to have their child and then returned to their homes and families after giving birth and going on with life as if nothing ever happened. The sense of loss and of grief as a result of these practices has been experienced both here in South Australia and across our nation. As one woman is quoted as saying in the Australian government Senate report, which brought this tragedy into the light more formally:

A mother whose child has been stolen does not only remember that child in her mind, she remembers with every fibre of her being.

This legacy of loss and of grief has been felt by mothers, fathers and their children, and the shock waves of these adoptions, those forced adoptions that were carried out in our suburbs, our towns, our neighbourhoods, our churches and hospitals, have been deeply felt by mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, grandparents, brothers and sisters over the years, and they are still being felt today. There is a sense of women and men struggling to reconcile the past and the present, of what should have been, of what could have been and of what is.

It is no excuse to sit back and say that these forced adoption practices were from a time in our history when people talked in hushed tones about girls 'getting into trouble', when the children were described as 'illegitimate'. There was a sense of shame in being an unmarried mother—the blame and shame of being told, 'You have got yourself into trouble.' Mothers were made to feel that blame and that shame profoundly because this was a time when mothers in these circumstances were caught in a trap, mothers whose first instinct was to say to themselves, 'I want to keep my baby.' A daughter who was adopted wrote to me and asked of me—and I use her words:

Please apologise for all the pain the secrets have caused, the separation of family. We all lost in this. There were no winners.

And it was a time of secrets and shame. Mothers have told how their particular circumstances have been a secret they have lived with all their life. Mothers have told how they felt they were backed into a corner by the subtle and no so subtle insistence was that the only thing to do was to give up your child—words like, 'You would be denying a lovely couple a child. The baby needs a proper mother,' or, 'If you loved your child you would give her up; it would be selfish not to.' Having a baby under these circumstances was a taboo subject, a situation that was not talked about even within

families. As one mum said, 'It's the silence that makes you sick.' Another said, 'You don't have a voice,' and another, 'You feel invisible, like an alien.' Mothers became invisible and fathers sometimes more so.

Today's apology says we cannot and we will not hide behind our history. There were no excuses for these forced adoption practices then, and there is no excuse now, because those practices from our past did hurt and did leave a legacy of loss and of grief. They did leave people living with secrets and without a sense of belonging. All of these painful experiences created a ripple effect which has touched the lives of so many members of our community.

I have been deeply moved by the experiences of mothers and the men and women who were taken away from their mothers when they were babies. I have seen the heartbreak, the pain and, yes, at times the anger. This connection with families and individuals, especially mothers, led me to the stories of many, many people, to learn of the grief and the pain and to also learn of the joy and the anguish of people who were reunited over the years. I would like to briefly recount a little of just one mother's experiences, Jane's story, as told to me by her daughter. Their stories are typical.

Jane was described in an adoptions branch report as a 'good average-type girl'. In the labour ward at the hospital her neonatal record was marked with the words 'illegitimate' and 'for adoption'. Jane told her daughter many years later that when she gave birth to her beautiful little girl the nursing staff placed a pillow on her chest so she could not see her baby as she was delivered. She was denied even seeing her baby at the moment of her birth. She was not told by the medical team if she had a boy or girl. She was not asked if she would like to hold her baby. Her child was simply whisked away. A few days' later, social workers did come to see Jane and told her she had given birth to a little girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. Years later, Jane reflected upon that day in a letter to her daughter, saying:

I was advised not to go down to see you in the nursery. That would be too traumatic. I would have held you and never let you go.

In some of those traumatic family situations, fathers were in the background neither acknowledged nor considered to have been hurt or to have felt the loss, but Jane told her daughter, and I quote these words to show that so many fathers also share that legacy of loss:

We loved each other very much. He still has all the letters and photos I gave him nearly 18 years ago. He said he gets very emotional on your birthdays and really wants to meet you.

So many mothers and fathers cried on their children's birthdays and no doubt many, many other days over the years they were apart from their children. There have been many, many tears shed. There were enormous expectations placed upon women during those times. In another letter to her daughter, Jane saw her own circumstances in the broader context of our society at that time, that sense of being trapped in a no-win situation. She recalled:

...a woman was expected to be virtuous and not get pregnant when she was still single. Married couples were expected to have children. If they didn't, society believed unmarried mothers should give their children to married couples who were childless. The secret adoption laws were cruel for both sides.

Jane's words echo the words of many of the courageous women and men who have contacted me to share their stories of being disconnected from their children and families. In another letter, a mother tells her daughter:

I was denied your childhood. It still hurts.

And why wouldn't it? I am sure this statement resonates with so many women and men whose lives have been forever changed by their past adoption experience; yet, Jane's story, as she termed it, was a success story because mother and daughter were eventually reunited. Jane's daughter found it was the most magical day of her life. Sadly, very sadly, many people do not have that ending. It is often a never-ending story of struggle to reconcile the past, the present and a future where that sense of loss is always there and very deeply and profoundly felt. Many mothers have never seen their child again. Sadly, Jane died before we, in this place, could tell her of our sorrow and apologise.

The ripple effect is felt over generations of children, brothers and sisters and grandparents and throughout families who know there is a child somewhere out there who belongs with them and yet does not belong because of those past forced adoption policies and practices. For some mothers, those policies even took away their right to be called a mother. One mother told me how

she refused to give up her child and so she was classified as an unlicensed foster mother. When she married some years later, she had to adopt her own child. As she said:

Apart from all the indignity and being frowned on by many, I was not classed as a 'mother'.

Today, we also acknowledge, with great respect, the women who were denied that recognition, the fundamental right of being recognised as a mum. So, today, what do we want from this day of apology? It is true, we cannot undo the past. We cannot rewrite these stories. We cannot restore that moment when a child was born and what should have been and could have been a moment of great joy as a mother held her child for the first time.

We cannot change those real experiences and real feelings that so profoundly shaped lives: the relationships, the sense of belonging, the loss and grief that is being felt today. At a practical level, we do offer the support of our Post Adoption Support Services through Relationships SA, support that may help to heal. For me personally, I offer my deep respect for the courage and the struggle that so many mothers, fathers, children and families have endured. I also offer my most sincere thanks to those who have told their personal stories, who have stepped forward to be a part of this occasion even if it has meant you have had to relive those experiences. Your bravery and courage is to be respected and is absolutely inspiring.

For our part, we want this day of apology to be a day of respect. We want to let each and every one of you who has suffered know that we are sorry. I offer you my own sincere, deeply felt sorrow, for what was done. We are sorry for what should never have been done. I am sorry. I hope this is also a day for looking beyond the sorrow and the grief. One person has told us:

You're always having to confront it and explain it. They say time heals but I'm still waiting.

Today, I hope this apology brings that time for healing a little closer for that person, and for many mothers and fathers, for all the women and men affected by forced adoption practices.

I hope this day will help you on your journey of healing and recovery and assist you to look to the future with a sense of hope and a stronger sense of belonging, because each and every one of the people affected by forced adoption practices and policies does belong. You are deeply valued members of our community. I believe very strongly that our community must always uphold, preserve and value the fundamental rights of mothers and fathers and every child.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr GARDNER (Morialta) (11:36):** Today our galleries are full to overflowing. It is sadly ironic, perhaps, that on a day when we gather here as a special sitting of this house to acknowledge the past adoption practices that have caused such distress, it is because of another overhang of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries—the asbestos in the House of Assembly chamber—that we are denied the opportunity to have that chamber available, where so many more people might have had the opportunity to see this directly.

I welcome all those mothers, sons, daughters, family members and other people who have been affected to our galleries today. I acknowledge also those in other rooms of the parliament who are watching this live and those people who are watching the web stream. We are grateful that that has been made available on this occasion. Many more people, of course, are watching through that online.

I recognise the contributions made by the Premier, the minister, and the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Liberal Party in particular, but also in seconding the motion to the parliament. This afternoon, members of the Legislative Council will have an opportunity to comment on the apology, and other members of the house in due course.

It is an important day for the South Australian community. It is an important day for this parliament and the institutions that this parliament is responsible for. Most importantly, of course, it is an important day for those affected by past adoption practices: the mothers, the sons and the daughters, and their families, so many of whom are here bearing witness today. Madam Speaker, with your leave, I seek leave to directly address my opening remarks to them.

To the mothers who had their babies taken away from them, we know that an apology cannot return a child who was taken for so many years. The loss of a son or daughter taken cannot be restored by a simply apology. Words alone cannot heal the hurt that you have suffered over decades. We hope, though, that they may provide some comfort. You may at least walk from this building feeling vindicated that your community understands that you did not freely give up your

child and that your children and your community understand that you never gave up on your child either.

The coercion that led to your child's adoption, whether it was overt or whether it was subtle, was brutal and wrong. It was inappropriate, it was unethical, it may have been illegal, and today this parliament makes a statement that it is condemned. It is condemned by this parliament on behalf of the institution itself and on behalf of the South Australian community.

On behalf of the parliament, which shares in the responsibility for these actions, we are sorry. In this day and age, children are put up for adoption in South Australia only when there is genuinely no opportunity for family to stay together and we work very hard to ensure that the very few adoptive parents who have this opportunity are everything that they might be; but in our history we have not always been so virtuous.

To the adoptees, to the sons and daughters who were taken at birth, I imagine that your experiences in life have been varied and diverse. Many of you may have been adopted into loving families who did their best for you at every turn. Some of you were not so fortunate, and your negative experiences make this apology all the more important.

Whatever the nature of your experience growing up, you share an understanding, a shared experience, a common bond; only you can truly understand what it is like to go through life for years—decades even—knowing that there is a missing piece. What was done to you, what was taken from you, the denial of a mother's love and the kinship of your blood brothers and sisters, was wrong, and, on behalf of this parliament, which shares in the responsibility for these actions, we are sorry.

While the centrepiece of this apology is an acceptance and an expression of sorrow for the denial of informed consent when children were taken from mothers at birth, its terms are broad, and with good reason. I commend the government for the framing of this motion. We are apologising for a wide range of practices that have caused hurt and distress. We are apologising for a range of practices that have led to a varied set of experiences.

My own experience was to grow up knowing a beautiful, loving big sister. She was adopted with love by our father and her mother. She has done well in life. She has been successful in her career. She has the most beautiful, charming and caring daughter that any of you here are ever likely to meet. However, what I could not have understood growing up was her sense that there was a missing piece in her life. Nearly 30 years later, she discovered that she had been separated at birth from her twin brother who now lived across the country. Last night she wrote to me on Facebook, in a sign of the times, with her thoughts on what we are doing today. She said:

It is such an important day for all adoptees, their adopted families and their mothers that gave up their babies so many years ago. Tomorrow—

this was written last night—

is a day to reflect on the past. I have been one of the lucky ones who have found both my twin brother...and also been able to tell our birth mother that we do not blame her for what has happened in the past and that we look forward to the future as brother and sister. Thank you for your support in this.

Despite not knowing each other for nearly the first 30 years of their lives, they have a bond of iron that stretches from Perth to Brisbane.

Twins were separated at birth all over the world, just as they were in South Australia, but that does not make it right. That does not make it acceptable. For that, and for so many other practices undertaken in our community by our government and non-government institutions with the endorsement of the parliaments of the day, either tacitly or overtly, we are sorry.

Members of parliament on both sides over the last several months in particular, but for a number of years before, have heard so many stories from mothers and adoptees about things that have happened to their families: stories of mothers prevented from seeing their child during and after childbirth; stories of mums hearing their babies' cries and wanting to hold them but being denied; stories of mums who could not hear their babies' cries and wanting to find out why but who were held down and denied the opportunity; stories of mothers drugged to reduce their resistance to the coercion and drugged to dry up their milk.

In originally moving this motion encouraging the government to undertake this apology on 29 March, I said that in addition to the lack of financial support provided to unwed mothers there were also cases where they were subjected to grooming by those around them and pressure,



including from state institutions. Moved from their community into the confines of a home, women were told that adoption was the right thing to do and the best thing for the child. Women had the details of their pregnancy and the future of their child concealed, while alternatives to adoption and information on potential financial assistance was often withheld. Relinquishing a child for adoption was often a traumatic process, and mothers have detailed their accounts to us and to the Senate inquiry, and the minister, the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have detailed some of those accounts today.

In many cases consent was surrendered under duress, others were denied the right to revoke consent and some had the right to consent withheld altogether. There is no excuse that it is based on the understanding, the morality, of the time. There were people at the time who were saying that these practices were wrong. There is record of that. There was no Christian morality in what was going on there. I have had calls recently to be reminded of the Ten Commandments in relation to another matter, and I can tell you that commandment 4 is, 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' These children, these adoptees, were denied the opportunity to do that. Commandment 7 is, 'Thou shall not steal.' These children were stolen. There was no morality in this.

The value of an apology is important. It is a moment of healing, reconciliation and opportunity for the parliament to demonstrate to those who are hurt that we have respect for you and that you are vindicated—those who have felt hurt all these years. When we as individuals going about our business commit a wrong we apologise, and when an institution commits a wrong its representatives must apologise, and we do so today.

We follow in the steps of the first apology of this nature in Australia undertaken on 9 June 2009 by the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, the Western Australian parliament on 19 October 2010, a number of other non-government institutions and churches that have done so since then, the Senate inquiry reporting in February (and I look forward to further activity at a federal level), the support of the Liberal party room, the Greens, the Labor party room, the government and bipartisan support in this house.

It is a time for healing and reconciliation, and we applaud those who have had the courage to come forward and to contribute to this apology. I conclude by reflecting the words of the Premier earlier:

This South Australian parliament recognises that the lives of many members of the South Australian community have been adversely affected by adoption practices which have caused deep distress and hurt, especially for mothers and their sons and daughters, who are now adults.

We recognise that past adoption practices have profoundly affected the lives of not only these people but also fathers, grandparents, siblings, partners and other family members.

We accept with profound sorrow that many mothers did not give informed consent to the adoption of their children.

To those mothers who were denied the opportunity to love and care for their children, we are deeply sorry.

We recognise that practices of our past mean that there are some members of our community who remain disconnected from their families of origin.

To [the adoptees] who were denied the opportunity to be loved and cared for by their families of origin, we are deeply sorry.

To those people who were disbelieved for so long, we hear you now; we acknowledge your pain, and we offer you our unreserved and sincere regret and sorrow for those injustices.

To all those hurt, we say sorry.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned on motion of Mrs Geraghty.

### **STATUTES AMENDMENT AND REPEAL (BUDGET 2012) BILL**

The Legislative Council agreed to the bill with the amendments indicated by the following schedule, to which amendments the Legislative Council desires the concurrence of the House of Assembly:

- No. 1. Clauses 31 to 34, page 14, line 13 to page 17, line 14—Leave out the clauses.
- No. 2. Clauses 46 and 47, page 26, line 15 to line 23—Leave out the clauses.

**CITRUS INDUSTRY (WINDING UP) AMENDMENT BILL**

Received from the Legislative Council and read a first time.

At 11:50 the house adjourned until Tuesday 4 September 2012 at 11:00.