

Home Hansard Legislative Assembly by date 15 September 2011

## Forgotten Australians (Proof)

About this Item

Speakers

Daley Mr Michael

Business

Private Members Statements, PRIV

### FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS

Page: 50

**Mr MICHAEL DALEY** (Maroubra) [4.03 p.m.]: Before a lady named Maureen McDonogh came to see me at my electorate office I did not know about the forgotten Australians. I do now, and I thank her for that. I refer those members who are not aware of the forgotten Australians to the report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee entitled "Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children". This does not include child migrants and Aboriginal children who were the subject of previous reports. The report was released in August 2004, is 438 pages long and contains 39 recommendations. It states:

Upwards of, and possibly more than 500 000 Australians experienced care in an orphanage, Home or other form of out-of-home care during the last century. As many of these people have had a family it is highly likely that every Australian either was, is related to, works with or knows someone who experienced childhood in an institution or out-of-home care environment. Children were placed in care for a myriad of reasons including being orphaned; being born to a single mother; family dislocation from domestic violence, divorce or separation; family poverty and parents' inability to cope with their children often as a result of some form of crisis or hardship ...

The Committee received hundreds of graphic and disturbing accounts about the treatment and care experienced by children in out-of-home care. Many care leavers showed immense courage in putting intensely personal life stories on the public record. Their stories outlined a litany of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and often criminal physical and sexual assault. Their stories also told of neglect, humiliation and deprivation of food, education and healthcare. Such abuse and assault was widespread across institutions, across States and across the government, religious and other care providers.

Maureen is one of six children; she had three sisters and two brothers. She lived on a farm in Dapto. In 1957 her mother died. Her dad, a farmer, placed five of his six kids in care with a close relative and paid maintenance to her. In 1959 Maureen and her siblings became wards of the State. Maureen was sexually abused by a relative at age 11 and reported the assault to the headmistress at school, which led to a police complaint. Her abuser, a close relative, was charged with the crime and released on bail only to come home and beat her. Consequently Maureen was placed in child welfare and, remarkably, she was institutionalised until 1969. She endured 33 movements between various children's homes, foster parents and other places where the system failed her time and time again—and continues to do so. Three months shy of her nineteenth birthday Maureen was released into the world with \$12 in her pocket—have a nice life. She is one of the 500,000. She tells me that she knows about 500 people in the same boat just from our local area, and there are others who choose not to revisit the trauma. Monday 16 November 2011 marks the second apology from Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull to the forgotten Australians. We welcome the apology but Maureen says, echoing the thoughts of so many:

Sorry is not enough. Sorry was never enough. They need to stop ducking and weaving. There were young kids ruined, robbed of an opportunity to lead a normal life. Children who could never now fulfil what they could have been, robbed of mum and dad, brothers and sisters who never had the opportunity to know each other, inheritances stolen, documents withheld, criminal and civil laws impeding, not helping. We want peace, we want reparation.

Maureen wants peace, as do all the forgotten Australians, and she wants reparation. I commend the report of the Senate committee. Of the 39 recommendations, No. 6 states:

That the Commonwealth Government establish and manage a national reparations fund for victims of institutional abuse in institutions and out of home care.

That has not been done. I know the Queensland Government moved some way towards doing that, but other governments have not. Another recommendation on which action is still outstanding is that full cooperation be received from all institutions and that, if it was not, there should be a Royal commission into State, charitable and church-run institutions and out-of-home care in the past century. That has not happened. Today—I will have more to say about this matter in the future—I call on this Government, the Opposition and all members of Parliament to read the Senate report in a bipartisan fashion and to consider our treatment of the Stolen Generations. When I return to the House, as I promised Maureen, I will put forward this issue for conscientious debate. The House has not heard the last from me about this matter—we owe it to the forgotten Australians.