

Victorian Government Apology to Forgotten Australians

9 August 2006 – 9 August 2006

Details

On 9 August 2006, the Premier Steve Bracks delivered an apology to Forgotten Australians on behalf of the Victorian Government.

The Victorian Government apologised to Forgotten Australians on 9 August 2006. This is the text of the apology, which was presented by the Premier Steve Bracks:

The government of Victoria welcomes the report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, Forgotten Australians, which was tabled in the Senate on 30 August 2004, as it offers an opportunity to offer a public statement of apology about some of the past practices in the provision of out-of-home care services in Victoria.

The report provides a detailed picture of the life experiences of many people who as children spent all or part of their childhood in institutional care across Australia. The experiences of many of these children were distressing and have had an enduring detrimental effect on their lives. The Victorian government believes it is important that these histories are known, are heard and are acknowledged.

The government is working hard to ensure that those unacceptable past practices are never ever again experienced by any Victorian child.

We acknowledge that there have been failures with respect to many children entrusted to care.

As a result of being placed in care, many of these children lost contact with their families.

The state, the churches and community agencies cared for thousands of children over the years. For those who were abused and 'neglected', the message we wish to give to them is that we acknowledge their pain and their hurt.

We are also committed to working together with survivors of abuse and neglect in care to promote the healing process.

We take the opportunity provided by the release of this report to express our deep regret and apologise sincerely to all of those who as children suffered abuse and neglect whilst in care and to those who did not receive the consistent loving care that every child needs and deserves.

On 9 August 2006, the standing orders of parliament were suspended to allow for the apology, and statements to be made by the leaders of the Liberal and National parties, and the Minister for Community Services.

While the apology from the Victorian government was welcomed by most care leavers, the government was roundly criticised for its mishandling of the actual ceremonies on the day. The Department of Human Services had sent invitations to former wards of state to attend the apology. Hundreds of care leavers accepted this invitation, but turned up on the day to find that only thirty members of the public would be allowed to sit in the public gallery in the Parliament.

The government had arranged for care leavers to watch the apology in a marquee erected behind Parliament House. Frank Golding of CLAN made the comment:

Many people thought the way the apology was delivered, with the tent at the back of the parliament building crammed with hundreds of care leavers viewing small TV screens, was pretty unimpressive.

Many care leavers were angry at the lack of space and accessibility at the Parliament on the day of the apology. According to the organisation Broken Rites,

many elderly Forgotten Australians became understandably angry. At the completion of the speech, the Premier was not prepared to go out to the marquee so the Leader of the Opposition and the Minister for Community Affairs did so instead.

Andrea Coote, a member of the Legislative Council criticized the Victorian government on 23 August 2006 for its mishandling of the event:

These people were led to believe that once again they were second rate; that they were not being given the recognition they were due; that it was only lip-service and that the Parliament did not want them in here at all, but were happy to shove them off into the gardens.

The ceremony did not include the perspectives and voices of care leavers. Some people raised concerns that the ceremony was 'a bit too quick for people to really hear and feel and give their experience'.

Angela Sdrinis, a lawyer representing many Forgotten Australians, described the apology as 'cynical', given that the Government had amended the Wrongs Act prior to making the apology, so that it stated that an apology did not constitute an admission of liability.

Others made the point that the apology was merely an empty gesture, as it was not accompanied by any redress or compensation scheme for Forgotten Australians.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
The Victorian Government apologised to Forgotten Australians after the release of the Forgotten Australians report.

Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat, Parliament of Australia, [*Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*](#), 2004
 - *Former state wards yet to see healing process implemented [transcript]*, Stateline Victoria, 16 March 2007
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