

Adoption Action

Adoption Law Reform

Annual General Meeting 8 May 2025

Convenors' Report

1. Loss of Key Adoption Reform Advocates

Robert Ludbrook's Passing

In October 2024, we attended the funeral of Robert Ludbrook in Auckland. His tireless advocacy for the rights of children and those affected by adoption, combined with his intellect and determination, have left a lasting legacy. A champion of social justice, Robert provided steadfast support to Adoption Action and the wider adoption community over many decades. Losing Robert has had a huge impact on us personally.

Remembering Joss Shawyer

In March 2025, we mourned the passing of [Joss Shawyer](#) in Cairns. Her book *Death by Adoption* profoundly impacted many people in the adoption communities. As founder of the Council for Single Mothers and co-founder of Jigsaw, Joss played a pivotal role in advancing mothers' and children's rights, including efforts with Robert Ludbrook to seek legal redress for adoption injustices.

2. Inaction on Adoption Law Reform

The Adoption Act 1955

Now in its 70th year, the outdated Adoption Act 1955 remains in place. Adoption law reform is currently not on the government's legislative agenda. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has publicly confirmed that reform work is "[paused](#)" due to "key" government priorities. Repeated requests to meet with the Minister and Associate Minister of Justice have gone unanswered.

Royal Commission Findings

The final report of the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care ([Whanaketia](#)) was released in June 2024, followed in November by a government apology to survivors of abuse in care. Despite adoption communities being directed by the MoJ to take adoption related concerns to the Commission, references to adoption in the report were limited - primarily noting harms caused by cross-cultural adoptions affecting Māori, and the experiences of mothers in institutional care.

The Commission failed to recognise the central role of state policy, agencies, and practice in the systemic abuse caused by the Adoption Act 1955 and it did not recommend adoption law reform or the need for an adoption inquiry.

Engagement with the Commission and the MoJ consultation processes was re-traumatising for many. That no progress or resolution has been made is unconscionable. By relegating adoption to the margins again, the Commission and the MoJ continue to marginalise and diminish the harm caused by adoption and ignore, yet again, the United Nations [Children's Committee request that New Zealand reform its adoption law](#).ⁱ

International Comparisons

Other countries have initiated robust inquiries into adoption law and practice, created support services, and used research findings to inform law reform. In contrast, New Zealand now lags behind other comparable countries by either refusing to pick it up or by dropping the ball when they almost have it. Until the Adoption Act 1955 is repealed, New Zealand remains in breach of several Articles of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC), that protects a child's identity, nationality, social and cultural rights, and family connections. ⁱⁱ

3. Community Sentiment and Shifting Awareness

Calls for Change

We are aware of a growing call within the adoption communities for alternatives to current adoption law in favour of models that, among other things, maintain a child's identity and familial connections. The voices of people adopted in and from other countries are also sharing their experiences, seeking support, and wanting answers about their adoption.

Programmes such as *David Lomas Investigates* and *Lost Families* have increased public awareness of the adoption experience. While some critique their format, these shows have gone some way to shift the adoption paradigm and challenge adoption myths. The exposure of adoption trauma/harm and illegal adoptions has prompted many to question the ethics of adoption as a 'solution' to care in any situation. One such story of illegal adoption can be viewed on [David Lomas Investigates programme first aired on 15 April 2025](#).

Technology and Advocacy

The internet, social media, DNA testing, and digitised records have been game changers for adoption communities. It is now easier and faster for people to undertake their own searching, share experiences and advocate for reform. These informal networks of support unite people within and beyond New Zealand. Through these media, we have seen a growing collective momentum for change.

Volunteer "search angels" and online communities also help people search records and navigate Oranga Tamariki (OT) and Court processes at no cost.

Inconsistency in Access to Records

Feedback about accessing adoption records from OT and the Courts remains mixed. While some feel supported, others face denials of similar requests, highlighting an inconsistent and inequitable approach.

4. Official Information Requests (OIAs)

Status of Reform Work

In late 2024, four OIA requests were submitted - two to the MoJ and two to OT. The responses, published on Adoption Action's website, revealed the following:

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- The MoJ confirmed that in May 2023, ‘the Minister of Justice has decided to slow down the adoption law reform work.’
- Section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Official Information Act 1982 allows for any policy proposals under consideration by the Minister to be withheld. Under this section, any policy proposal report prepared for the Minister remains elusive to Adoption Action.
- A [March 2024 report to the Minister of Justice](#) stated reform work was “paused due to competing work priorities.”

Absence from Key MoJ Documents

It appears the pause button remains engaged as adoption law reform is not mentioned in:

- The MoJ [Statement of Intent 2023–2027](#).
- The [Briefing to the Incoming Minister](#) (November 2023).
- The MoJ [Annual Report 2023–2024](#).

There is currently no indication that the present government intends to progress adoption reform.

Data Collection

An [OIA response from December 2024](#) revealed limited demographic data was collected during the law reform consultation, hindering submission analysis. Despite years of advocacy for improved adoption data, only the online survey requested respondents to provide demographic data.

5. Conclusion

Despite the government's inaction, public awareness and pressure for reform are growing. The adoption communities continue to mobilise through modern tools and shared experiences. Adoption Action remains committed to pushing for meaningful reform and recognition of the harms caused by outdated legislation and we hope to hold and event later in the year to mark the 70th year of the Adoption Act 1955.

Fiona Donoghue and Susan Atkin

Convenors

ⁱ In UNCRC Children’s Committee [2016 report](#) to the New Zealand Government, the Committee made the following recommendations, which is reiterated again in its [2023 report](#):
That the State party [the New Zealand Government]:

- (a) Promptly review the adoption legislation, on hold since before 2003, to align it with the Convention;
- (b) Ensure that the best interests of the child are a paramount consideration in all adoption cases;
- (c) Ensure in practice that the child’s views are heard and consent is required, in accordance with the child’s evolving capacities in adoption processes;
- (d) Ensure the right of adopted children to access information about their biological parents, their culture and identity.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*