

CORRECTED VERSION

LAW REFORM COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Access by Donor-Conceived People to Information about Donors

Melbourne— 17 October 2011

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Witnesses

Mr R. Clarke, and
Ms S. Pinder-Clarke.

The CHAIR — Thanks for coming in. My name is Clem Newton-Brown, I'm the Chair of the Law Reform Committee, and a Member of Parliament. This is a cross-party Committee and we get given references from Parliament to do inquiries and report to Parliament, which may or may not result in legislative change in the future. Russell Northe is here, Jane Garrett and Anthony Carbines. Donna Petrovich is unable to be here this afternoon. We're pretty informal here. Thank you very much for putting in your submission and agreeing to come in and have a chat with us; we're trying to get a broad spread of various people who have interests and experience in the whole area so it's great to have some individuals come in as well.

As far as the hearing goes, everything is taken down and there will be a transcript and a report prepared. You're protected by Parliamentary privilege with anything you say here but not outside the room, so just bear that in mind; if you say anything outrageous keep it in this room and not to a journalist. If you could start with your names and address for the record and then launch into what you want to tell us.

Mr CLARKE — My name is Roger Clarke. Perhaps some background to my situation would help.

The CHAIR — Before we go on, it's also Susanne?

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Yes. My name's Susanne Pinder-Clarke. I also live at the same address. Is that all you need?

The CHAIR — Yes. Go ahead.

Mr CLARKE — Perhaps I should preface what I have to say today with my story because it will make sense in regard to the position that I have on this matter. Back in the 1980s, I was a sperm donor at Prince Henry's Hospital in St Kilda Road, at their Andrology Unit there, and I participated for a number of years there and of course went into the program with full anonymity, and that was understood. However, at the time you had to complete a form of about six pages that was headed: non-identifying information. This allowed donors to have on the file information that perhaps offspring one day might ask, and it was stuff like education, personal interests, a bit about your family; they were sort of rather open-ended questions. The last question on that form was very relevant to what we're talking about here today, and it simply said: would you be prepared at any stage to meet your offspring? You could tick the box yes or no, and I had no hesitation whatsoever in ticking the yes box. Yes, I would be quite happy to meet any offspring that might come about.

The CHAIR — Before you move on from that, we haven't heard of that being on any forms that we've seen.

Ms GARRETT — In fact, the evidence before the Committee has been with the forms that you had to absolutely say you would remain anonymous.

The CHAIR — We've been given a series of consent forms of varying lengths.

Mr CLARKE — This wasn't a consent form.

The CHAIR — Would you have a copy of that?

Mr CLARKE — Yes, I would. I could probably table that.

The CHAIR — That would be of interest.

Ms GARRETT — That would be very helpful.

The CHAIR — Go on.

Mr CLARKE — We need to fast forward 19 years and I had a call from VARTA that an application had been made by one of my offspring, and would I be prepared to meet him? Of course I said yes; I maintained my position over those 19 years. I thought about it from time to time, as you do, what's happened to those kids? I've got five children from the program, three boys and two girls, and one young fellow had made an application to meet me.

The CHAIR — Before you go on, do you have other children as well?

Mr CLARKE — I've got two daughters, yes. I went through the process that VARTA had adopted to allow the parties to engage, and this was very, very sensitively done. It was a program where counselling was offered, I had a very long counselling session with one of the counsellors at VARTA, explored my motives. I suppose the bottom line was they were prepared to erect a safety net in case this newly created relationship might fail, and that offered me some reassurance. I had never really thought it would, because I was always keen to meet offspring.

Anyway, we went through the counselling process and I was asked a week or two later to attend their offices again because the actual meeting would take place, and it did, and this young fellow walked through the door and I came face-to-face with him — his name is Riley. At the time he made the application I think he'd just turned 19 and he had wanted to know his biological beginnings from when he was three; his mother had always told him about his beginnings and he wanted to know. He told me that he had all these sort of visions about what I might look like, and how we ought to meet. When he walked through the door I knew who he was just from his manner and bearing and everything else.

I can safely say this has been one of the high points of his life so far, he was so keen to meet me, and we spent the next hour sitting in the VARTA office just nonstop talking about our situations. I was able to answer a lot of his key questions about his beginnings and about my family background. I even talked about my medical history, he was very interested in that, and I was also keen to learn about him and how he grew up. We subsequently made ourselves available to the media. VARTA asked if I would be prepared to do that, and asked Riley as well, if we'd be prepared to do this, and we both took this up as a very interesting case to present to the public. This was an overwhelmingly positive story. The Australian did a photo and quite a long story that headed up about our relationship was one that had no road map and this to me summed up the situation, that we were in a relationship where I'm biologically Riley's dad but I'm not his dad. I get asked whether or not I'm paternal towards him, and that's a question I can't easily answer because sometimes I am. He asks my advice so you find yourself being paternal.

We've subsequently done television appearances, we've been interviewed by the London Times, we've done quite a bit of stuff over the last two years, and this story has drawn a lot of social interest, and no more so than amongst our own families. My family has always known that I've been a sperm donor. My wider circle of friends now know, and universally welcome the news and the idea of this, and the story about Riley because it's a great one.

With that in mind, let me address the Terms of Reference that you've presented to me.

Ms GARRETT — Excuse me Mr Clarke, just to clarify, when did you donate?

Mr CLARKE — In the mid-1980s so pre-88. Anonymity was available to me at that time.

The CHAIR — How many of your offspring have contacted you?

Mr CLARKE — One. Just one.

The CHAIR — You know nothing about the others?

Mr CLARKE — No. I just know the gender and the month of birth.

The CHAIR — And presumably, if you could, you would want to find out more about them?

Mr CLARKE — Yes. Riley wants to meet them more than I do.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — But we've collectively made a decision that we will not contact them because I feel quite strongly that that would be extraordinarily disruptive. We've had some dealings with a relationship in a family where it is a secret and I think that would be very counterproductive so we've just said we will not do it.

Mr CLARKE — I'm happy to wait.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Let them make the first move — that's the sort of decision. I suppose just to add to what Roger said, this has been a collective decision right from the beginning that involves both of us, we've talked about it, and so it's not been a singular decision, we have gone into it together. The idea of anonymity to me is just unthinkable, to have a situation where a person desperately needs to know their biological identity and to deny them that is — I just couldn't do it. Having met Riley myself and you see the likeness, the repetition of Roger's genetics is so patently obvious, and for him it is just unthinkable that he would be denied that.

It's little things that really cement this in your mind. Roger had written on this information sheet at the beginning he was never good at mathematics and not that good with women. And Riley said: is that true, mate? And Roger said: yep. Riley said: well, I'm exactly the same. So here is a person sitting opposite somebody who can see the reason for their general genetics. He can't see it in his father, even though he knows that that's the situation, to come in contact with a person that presents to you the genetic package, for him is just almost like a miracle. He can say to Roger: look, I now understand why I'm like I am because I can ask you about these things that affect me. And they're personal things, which I found really

interesting. That he was so wanting to know sort of quite micro things about himself, and it reassured him that he could get this information from somebody by just picking up the phone.

Mr CLARKE — Point (a), the issues arising from allowing access to identifying information about donors, consent or otherwise. As you've guessed now, I'm an advocate for openness; absolutely no question about that. I believe we are in a society where we are breaking down a lot of the taboos, we are asking whether the policies of old still work today in many of these things, that anonymity and secrecy and a perceived veil of bureaucracy that hide truths may not be the way that we should be handling these things.

If we consider the two parties, the way I look at it the pre-voluntary registered donors have their anonymity absolutely locked in, and this is the issue of course that you're looking at. But look at the other side, the offspring are locked out. I believe you've had Narelle Grech appear, and I've known Narelle for a few years, and I've known about her passion, and I see her as a person who has been locked out of knowing about her biological inheritance. We have to ask ourselves: is this fair? We also should have to ask ourselves: whose rights prevail in a situation like this? Is this an issue of human rights? Do the rights of anonymity override the rights of a child to know? I'm a believer in the rights of a child to know having precedence over the rights to anonymity, as hard as that may sound for donors of the past. We have to develop some form of sensitive strategy to kind of break — break down the taboo is not the right word, but to deal with the sensitive areas here.

This perhaps lets me move onto point (b) in the Terms of Reference: the relevance of donor consent regarding the release of identifying information. Of course, now donor consent is absolutely everything. Donor consent at the moment, or up until now, has hinged — certainly pre-1988 — on the idea of anonymity and we are asking ourselves today whether this should be protected. This has been the hardest part for me to think through, to bring something to this Committee that is constructive and practicable. As a donor I've put myself in the situation of a person who is clinging to anonymity, for whatever reason. People have asked me: why can't donors just open up the doors? Well, there are all sorts of reasons.

A medical specialist that I see, I was talking to him the other day about this and he said that when he was at Melbourne Uni doing medicine he was asked to be a donor and he thought about it and in the end declined. I mentioned to him last week about my situation and he was absolutely horrified to hear that anonymity could be stripped away. I took the matter no further with him, but it raised in my mind here is a man who is very well known in the medical fraternity, maybe he's afraid of the repercussions that might occur both professionally and in a family way if he was suddenly to declare that he was a donor and maybe had a number of kids out there that he'd never met and who might want to meet him. That coming from someone in the medical profession did surprise me.

Just as we've been accepting of adoption and the idea of allowing adopted children to trace their biological parents, and there hasn't been a huge amount of resistance in this as I see it, that's a path that I think we need to go down as a society, that the adoption model might be the way to go but handled in a slightly different way, which takes me to (c) and (d) in the Terms of Reference about the practical difficulties in releasing information about pre-1988 donors.

Aside from the administrative issues that relate to record keeping, the greater social difficulty will be sensitivity — I think we all know that — personal sensitivity is absolutely everything.

I think we know anecdotally that pre-88 donors assumed that anonymity was going to be forever, and unless they've been following the media lately they have no cause to feel that that might change.

Ms GARRETT — Mr Clarke, can I interrupt and just ask a question on that. Did you have much contact with other donors at all?

Mr CLARKE — No.

Ms GARRETT — I'm just interested whether your general view has been that people in your situation are open to the contact.

Mr CLARKE — I've had contact with no more than five other donors and none of them are bothered about anonymity. Two of them are great advocates for openness. I think the perception of anonymity has to change. How do we do this? Well, I can't bring answers here, I can bring some ideas that might help because I'm a donor and I say to myself: if I was anonymous, how would I respond to this?

I believe that we ought to enact something like sensitive engagement with people who are donors, and it might be along the lines of a public campaign that talks about anonymity being a thing of the past, and that, socially, young people need to have a right to know who their biological parents are, and that right will take precedence over previous rights of anonymity. I'm not sure how we do this but I think it can be done. It can be done, first of all, at a general level, that is a general community level, and then perhaps later on at a personal level. If there's an example of how this might work, we could look at the program that VARTA has run in the last few years called Time to Tell, which you're probably familiar with, and Time to Tell was a good campaign. I'm not sure what the results have been but the people at VARTA would know that. But something along those lines with those sort of sensitivities might work.

Point (e) the impact on donors, donor-conceived people and future donor programs. I think it's very clear that the releasing of donor information may cause some alarm amongst pre-1988 donors. If they had the option to object to that, they will have to declare themselves so they've put themselves in a no-win situation; they are, in a way, backed into a corner and if they're facing the prospect of this being legislation they have nowhere to go on this. It occurred to me that there might be a right of veto in some way, I'm not sure that that would work.

What about donor-conceived people, how would they react? Well, I think many would welcome the change. People like Narelle certainly would. It would be very much akin to adopted children being allowed to find out who their biological parents, their birth parents, were. And it's here that I underscore the positive results that come from this; in my experience those results can be overwhelmingly positive. The legislation has to be aware of what any change might make to donor insemination programs.

Back in the 80s I stepped forward — I was working in advertising at the time — and undertook to design and produce a little campaign to try and attract donors into the Prince Henry's fold. At the time there was only 11 donors when I was there and I produced a little campaign which consisted of a brochure and I did some anonymous media interviews. I appeared on Channel 9 all blacked out and the Herald did a story.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — But everybody knew, because they rang up and said: we heard your voice.

Mr CLARKE — I was able to get the donor lists up to about 30 through that campaign, and it occurred to me that if donors believed that they no longer had anonymity you might scare them off, so that has to be looked at. One of the things I checked out recently is: what's on the Internet on this? I've come across some on-line forums where there are donors who are quite willing to come forward, and women who are also looking for donors, and anonymity is never discussed; they're quite happy to declare themselves and also to be available to meet the children at a later date and without hesitation. I don't think I ever read an entry on any of those forums that said: I'm happy to donate sperm but I have to be anonymous; I don't want anything to do with it afterwards.

The CHAIR — On that point, when you ticked the box saying you are happy to have contact, did you ever have any thoughts about what about claims on my estate if I've got all these children? The law is clear now but obviously it wouldn't have been clear through that whole period.

Mr CLARKE — No, that was made very clear. In all the consent forms that I had to sign at Prince Henry's those aspects were made very clear to me. That's a great fear and it's one that our friends always ask: is Riley going to step forward and want half your estate? And he knows that but, no, that's never been a concern. No.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Can I just comment on one thing about the anonymity that I find really interesting. When you involve yourself in the program from the beginning, and agree to receive assistance, donor conception assistance, the form says: you must tell. But you can't enforce it. So what's the point in having it there? You know, part of the deal that you enter into when you go on the program is you must tell.

Mr CLARKE — We're talking about recipient — —

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Recipient donors.

Mr CLARKE — No, recipient parents. When they sign up for donor insemination.

Ms GARRETT — Nowadays.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — No, right at the beginning when we signed.

The CHAIR — That the parents have to tell the children?

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Yes, that's part of the deal but it's unenforceable. How do you do it?

Mr CLARKE — VARTA know it's unenforceable.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — So that to me strikes a little bit at the heart of this, it's not as if this is new, the notion of knowing has been part of the program since we've been involved with it.

Mr CLARKE — It's interesting that Riley has two siblings who don't want to know.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Not interested.

Mr CLARKE — They're not interested.

Ms GARRETT — They know they're donor-conceived but they don't want to — —

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Yes.

Mr CLARKE — It's not that they don't want to, Riley just says they can't be bothered. They're only teenagers.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — But there's all sorts of other minor family issues that occur that are quite sensitive that I perhaps as a woman might observe, and that is you don't know what the implications have been for him. Riley says to me he had a very poor relationship with his father, his father was an architect and there had been some sort of mental breakdown — I don't know all the detail — but this is some of the background. Now you don't know what the situation is with his fertility or his manhood, or whatever all those issues are that are associated with those sort of things that people feel very deeply. We still don't know, and it doesn't really matter, but you can see the impact that they have on a family situation where he says as a child he had a terrible relationship with his father. Now he's got the best relationship with his father he's ever had — and they're his words. Suddenly the fear or the notion of something in the background about his situation with his parentage has been removed, so this uncertainty that might have existed for the father and the family and anyone else has now gone. I don't know why that is because I don't know all the circumstances but I was interested and curious as to how that had evolved.

Ms GARRETT — We had similar evidence earlier today of that as well. It was interesting that once it was out in the open the relationship actually was the best that it had been.

Mr CLARKE — I was invited to Riley's 22nd birthday party earlier this year up at his home at Castlemaine. His mum rang up — I'd never spoken to his mum before — and rang me and asked me to come up to be part of a surprise party. Riley had always told me, because I had said to him: I'm happy to meet your parents. And Riley's answer was always: mate, that is never going to happen. He was adamant about it. And then one day his mum rang me and said: would you be prepared to come along? That was the most wonderful thing. I was terribly apprehensive about this, meeting his family, but everyone was so welcoming and embracing, it was terrific. In fact, his mum came up and gave me a big hug when she met me at the station, and it was terrific. That's the upside to it.

If I can just address the final point, that's point (f), the transfer of donor registers. I was very disappointed when the registers were handed to Births, Deaths and Marriages. VARTA had, as we know, been managing those, and I think that's been done in a most unsatisfactory way. I had a look on Births, Deaths and Marriages last week, there's nothing there that says that they will perform the service of bringing together donors and offspring, and they're supposed to be doing this, but there's nothing on the website that says that.

I'm a recipient of counselling services from VARTA, and I need to declare here that I also have a commercial interest in my dealings with VARTA because I've helped them with their Time to Tell campaign by producing podcasts that have helped parents tell their kids about donor conception. I've been out and interviewed a great number of families — parents and lesbian couples and kids — to get attitudes and to discover what the language is that's used. Parents say: how do I tell my kids they're donor-conceived? What words do you use? And I asked them, I say: how did you tell your kids? And I've recorded all this and made up podcasts and I've done it partially on pro bono but partially been paid, had my costs met, so I have that commercial interest with them.

I'm a strong advocate of the registers being held by VARTA because they have the sensitivities and at the time had the counselling services to be able to do this, to manage it, and the way they do it is very, very good. If they were properly funded and they revived those counselling services, I think that would be a good service to the community. If the Time to Tell campaign is a bit of a model then what we're talking about here today, they could use that model. Let me just conclude by saying that would be a profoundly positive step for VARTA to handle the registers again.

That really concludes the points that I wanted to make today.

Ms GARRETT — Through you, Chair. Just another question, thank you. And thanks very much for your testimony in being so frank and generous with your time and your spirit on this stuff. When Riley made contact with you, because you were at Prince Henry's; is that right?

Mr CLARKE — Yes.

Ms GARRETT — We've heard substantial evidence about some of the issues with Prince Henry closing down and the records and stuff. VARTA contacted you?

Mr CLARKE — Yes.

Ms GARRETT — Did they have the Prince Henry's records?

Mr CLARKE — Yes, they had them, before they were handed to Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Ms GARRETT — So they had those records and there was no problems with your records and Riley's?

Mr CLARKE — No.

Ms GARRETT — It was easy to match you both. How did they first contact you, was it through mail or did they call you?

Mr CLARKE — Ironically, I was in the middle of doing one of these podcasts for them, so I was having day-to-day contact. They rang me, and I thought they were just ringing about work in progress. I said: everything is okay, I'll have it ready by Tuesday. They said: no, that's not what we're calling about, we're calling about something a lot more personal than that. Riley had been given his file, his mum had had this file, and on his 18th birthday that

was his birthday present, and he got this file with a copy of my non-identifying information in it and he went straight up to VARTA and, as the counsellor said, he stood at the desk and told them: I'm here on business. That set the ball rolling for VARTA to contact me and the process was somewhat accelerated for me, that is they normally write, but they knew me so they phoned me. They normally give you time to think about things, whether or not you want to have contact, and I said: no, I don't need time, I don't need to write back to you, the answer is yes. So they said: okay, would you be prepared to meet next Tuesday week? Yes. So they set up the counselling session then set up the meeting.

Mr NORTHE — Going back, Roger, so at the time when you signed the forms you chose "yes" for the ability to be able to have contact?

Mr CLARKE — Yes. I was also given the opportunity to sign the voluntary register, I think it was in 1988 or just after, to sign that, so VARTA always knew that I was happy to have contact.

Mr CARBINES — Chair. Mr Clarke, how might it work when we've talked about as a donor you're not actively seeking contact with donor-conceived offspring, but how might a fuller disclosure provide opportunities for someone like Riley to be able to get access to information regarding potential siblings?

Mr CLARKE — Probably no more different than me applying. I'm not clear whether I have that right under law to apply. I don't think I do. I thought I did but I don't think I do, and I think Riley would be in a similar situation to meet siblings.

Mr CARBINES — So the changes that you might think were acceptable were more around not so much the donors would have access to information, or if that information was available to donors about their offspring, you would probably choose not to pursue — —

Ms GARRETT — It's more about the donor-conceived child.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — He's desperate for it, he keeps asking Roger. We have two daughters, they don't want to know, he doesn't want to know them.

Mr CLARKE — Well, they're just disinterested.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — There's not really any need, they're okay with it.

Mr CLARKE — But Riley is very interested.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — He keeps saying to Roger: have you heard from any of the others? For him, that's a really significant thing and we just have to say: no, we haven't.

Mr CARBINES — Because if that were the case then that might be a discussion that you would potentially then have with Riley.

Mr CLARKE — Yes.

Mr CARBINES — If another offspring contacted you.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Absolutely.

Mr CLARKE — Yes, definitely.

Ms GARRETT — Bearing in mind the issues with that offspring, protecting what they would need and want as well.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — That's right. This is why the dialogue to me is just so crucial in this whole process, that the veil of secrecy at all levels must be removed, but it needs to provide a comfort zone. You can't just suddenly strip everything away and ask people to feel comfortable, that's just not possible. From the observations and the processes that we've been through, to me it's blindingly obvious that there has to be a process where secrecy is removed with some degree of comfort. I don't know what that is, I'm not a politician, that's the difficult thing you're going to have to work at, but just looking at the parties involved and human nature being what it is, it is absolutely crucial that the core of your being must be accessible to you and to not have it, to me, is just — I reiterate — unthinkable.

We've got a situation in our own family where there is some nondisclosure about a person's heritage, and it's tormented that person shockingly. So I've seen it from both sides, whether it's genetic uncertainty that can't be proven, and I see this in some ways as a similar sort of reflection of that. Just because it's outside the family, the process doesn't have to be that different. Honesty, integrity, lack of secrecy are all the things that make human beings' lives livable, enjoyable and connectable and without that connection I just think it's a bit grim.

The CHAIR — All right. Any final questions.

Mr NORTHE — Mr Chairman, a bit of a hypothetical. I'm just rolling through my mind about how this will play out, and I guess we're talking about the donor remaining anonymous pre-88 and whether we wind that back to the right terminology. What about a reverse? Say if you've got Narelle's situation and you've got the reverse where the donor may have an illness that's genetic and he is trying to contact the donor-conceived person, yet the donor-conceived person doesn't even know that they are donor-conceived?

Mr CLARKE — That is equally disturbing because many children — in fact I will say most — don't know they were donor-conceived.

Mr NORTHE — And that's probably indicative of the register itself, more donors than donor-conceived persons on the register.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Yes.

Mr NORTHE — I guess I'm saying if you're talking about amending legislation to open up access to the donors, do we do that in reverse and then what complications do you create as a consequence?

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — This is the basis of the whole integrity process.

Mr CLARKE — But it puts the parents on notice, just as what we are talking about today puts the donors on notice. There may well be a case here for putting everybody on notice

somehow, that's in everybody's interests. I don't know how we paint this up but it's in everybody's interest that openness should prevail.

Mr CARBINES — Chair, just picking up on that. Mr Clarke, you are saying putting people on notice because while the information might be available, unless you're a donor-conceived offspring who is advised of your circumstances, as much as the information might be freely available potentially you might still be in a position where that link is not able to be made?

Mr CLARKE — Yes. There's also the serious aspect of the age at which people find out, and the older you are the harder it is.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — The longer you leave it, the worse it gets.

Mr CLARKE — If you tell kids when they can barely understand the idea, that's fine, but if you tell them when they're 27, it can be devastating.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — The other thing too is, just on a more fundamental issue, that if you're not careful you can end up marrying someone you're related to. There is still potential for that to happen.

Mr CLARKE — Policies now have been tightened up on that.

Ms GARRETT — Mr Clarke, you've obviously played an integral role in the Time to Tell campaign; that was purely educative, voluntary?

Mr CLARKE — Yes.

Ms GARRETT — Was that advertised only through the media, people weren't written to, were they?

Mr CLARKE — No.

Ms GARRETT — So families were never written to and said this is happening. How was the word got out?

Mr CLARKE — It was done through PR channels, as far as I know. There was statements made by the CEO at the time — Helen Szoke, I think was there then — and they ran little press ads in the papers, which they were very gently worded but they were in no doubt about the purpose of them, that you should think seriously about telling your children about their beginnings and directing them to the website, and there were PDF files and podcasts on the website that gave them the strategies to do it. That was the hardest thing. The hardest thing was: how do you tell your kids that dad is not your dad? That was the biggest hurdle they faced, which is why we went out and talked to parents who had done this.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — The other interesting thing too is that Riley is actively wanting to be involved; in fact, he's a bit of a PR lover, he loves talking about it. I find that really interesting as well, that he engages in a very positive way about the experience for him and the experience for us. And we're lucky, both sides have had positive experiences, and we've had an ongoing involvement with VARTA and the various implications of the decisions that

we've actually had to undergo as being part of this program. There is no fear. For me, if you're honest — like everything you do in life, you have a discussion, you make some decisions and you take a course of action. If you do that, it's not that difficult. It's only when you start to suppress this information that you create a sense of fear and foreboding about what might happen. I think for me, that's what's got to be diminished. More openness has got to prevail, which does mean some tough decisions because the end of anonymity will scare blokes witless, I'm certain of it.

The business of telling can be too powerful. We've had an experience where a young child in school blurted all this out in the course of a conversation in the classroom and the teacher was a bit confronted by all of this. But the teacher had enough common sense to contact the mother and put all this in context and it became from a bit scary to a really positive story. The child was so well briefed: I came from here, I did this, and in mummy's tummy. He had the whole thing worked out, it was the teacher who was a bit taken aback, but she was sensible enough to approach the mother and say: this is what's happened, it's a good story and the class want to engage with it. Kids are not fearful. If you give them the facts they will say: this is great. So the kid became a bit of a celebrity, so this is the way the whole thing sort of happens.

Mr CLARKE — One of the common questions that I've had in all my media interviews is: what does your wife think about all this?

Ms GARRETT — I'd say you've done very well there.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — It was my decision.

Mr CLARKE — Susanne started this whole thing of me becoming a donor because she heard Gab Kovacs on 3LO one morning back in 1980-something or other. And Susanne said: you can do this, you can become a sperm donor. We've got two girls, we don't need any more kids. And that's how it all started and it's kind of been a collective thing in a way. I think if we widened this point out about what would wives say if they found out — —

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — Or partners.

MR CLARKE — Partners, whatever it was, found out that their husband or partner had been a sperm donor and got five kids, how would they react? My view about that is, again, openness. I'm happy to be a case study and all this to show how it can work but ours has been a collective decision all the way along the line.

The CHAIR — All right. Thank you very much for coming, it's been helpful.

Ms PINDER-CLARKE — I wish you well; it's a tough decision.

Witnesses withdrew.