My son-in-law and son alerted me to this Inquiry, and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute in some small way to this critical review of Australia's surrogacy laws.

My parenting background has been very traditional – I am the mother of five sons with my late husband. We were married in a religious ceremony, and so have my children, except for my third son and his husband, who were married in a civil ceremony. I have nine beautiful grandchildren – of these, two have been born via surrogacy. My professional background is likewise conventional. For nearly twenty years, I have worked as a school counsellor in regional New South Wales – the wellbeing of children and their families has been my life's work.

So, I am writing this submission as a grandparent of two little boys who were born via surrogacy. As a mother and mother-in-law of a same sex couple, I would say I have a very close personal connection with their challenges and the challenges that LGBTQ+ families experience in the surrogacy process.

When my son married, he and his husband were keen to start a family. I watched them navigate the complex and emotionally fraught system of altruistic surrogacy here in Australia, where a multitude of difficulties finally saw them look overseas. I am hopeful that many of these difficulties will be resolved due to changes in legislation brought about by this inquiry. As a mother, I watched on as their journey into parenthood was filled with hope and joy, but also confusion, emotional strain, significant financial cost and deep uncertainty of the legal status of the boys once they arrived.

I respectfully urge the Commission to recommend the following reforms so that families like those of my son and son-in-law can access surrogacy within our country. Changes that would assist are:

1. A single national surrogacy framework so that there is consistency between all Australian states and territories
2. Automatic legal parent recognition at birth. If all parties have consented before conception, then we need to remove this legal uncertainty. This would significantly reduce the emotional and legal vulnerability for families
3. Decriminalisation of international commercial surrogacy. We must protect the rights of all and ensure there is no exploitation, and this can only be achieved if there are laws around ensuring the process is ethical, transparent and safe, with protections built in for both surrogates and children
4. Clear national guidelines on reimbursable expenses. Surrogates deserve to be reimbursed fairly for out-of-pocket costs. More women might be interested in

becoming a surrogate if they felt there were clear guidelines to ensure they were not financially vulnerable.

5. Creation of a national donor and surrogate registry so that children born via surrogacy should have access to information about their gestational and biological origins. This, of course, would include medical history.

Surrogacy is the only pathway to parenthood for same-sex male partners. My opinion here is that these children are born of love, and every step along the way is "intentional". Our family welcomed these beautiful children with joy. Still, we are all mindful of the journey their Dad's have undergone – one full of emotional strain and much of that has been due to the inadequacies of our existing surrogacy laws. The ALRC has the opportunity to help our nation build a compassionate, inclusive, and human-rights-based system that prioritises children and families, regardless of how they have come to be.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]