



WHY CAN'T WE adopt?



Too many orphaned children are waiting too long to become part of Australian families, according to actress Deborra-lee Furness and other advocates of inter-country adoption, writes **Jordan Baker**.

It's a painful, puzzling paradox that creates deep heartache for all those couples who long to be parents: while there are so many orphaned, impoverished children around the world, why is it so hard for Australian families to adopt?

Deborra-lee Furness, wife of actor Hugh Jackman and mother to two adopted children from the United States, Oscar, 10, and Ava, five, believes Australian authorities encourage an anti-adoption culture. "There are no services to support people who adopt children," she tells *The Weekly*. "There's no system in place and all of these kids in [disaster-stricken] Haiti ... nightly, kids are dying from malnutrition."

Deborra-lee is the patron of National Adoption Awareness Week, which runs from November 8 to 14. The aim is to highlight the difficulties faced by Australian couples seeking to adopt children overseas. Australia has the second lowest adoption rate of any OECD country (there were just 270 children adopted from overseas last

year, despite the long waiting lists around the country).

Applicants face a series of hurdles before their application is even sent overseas. They face medical tests, background checks and interviews by government authorities. They must also choose a country and fulfil its requirements. For instance, some countries demand couples be married, not de facto, others have age and even Body Mass Index limits. It can take several years and thousands of dollars to adopt a child – and that's *if* your application is accepted.

"Once you leave our shores and you see how many amazing kids there are, it's hard to imagine why we don't put more resources into helping families connect," says Diane Harapin, a member of the National Adoption Awareness Week committee. "We want our government to create an independent body to look at why our system is so slow – some people here wait seven years, in America, it's 10 months. That's a kid waiting for seven years." ❧



SANDRA BULLOCK began her adoption process four years ago and in January brought home her new baby son, Louis, from New Orleans.



KATHERINE HEIGL and her husband Josh Kelley adopted Naleigh from Korea, in late 2009. The actress' sister Margaret was also adopted from Korea.



ANGELINA JOLIE and her brood (from left), Maddox, eight, Zahara, five, and Pax, six, who were adopted, and Shiloh, four, her daughter with actor Brad Pitt.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GUY LAWRENCE; SANDRA BULLOCK: MIRA