

ever, but society is growing less hospitable for tykes

Until the law is enacted, breastfeeding discrimination complaints must be handled under the sex discrimination provisions of the Act.

In July, Qantas reached a confidential settlement with a 67-year-old passenger who claimed she suffered permanent hearing damage when a three-year-old screamed near her on one of its planes at Alice Springs Airport.

In an email allegedly written to her travel agent a day after the incident in January last year, the woman wrote, "I guess we are simply fortunate that my ear drum was exploding and I was swallowing blood. Had it not been for that, I would have dragged that kid out of his mother's arms and stomped him to death."

Closer to home, the owner of Chimes resort in Denmark, Kane Randle, fell foul of the law last year after advertising his upmarket retreat as "adults only".

When a US tourist complained that this discriminated against her and her three-year-old daughter, Mr Randle sought an exemption from the law on health and safety grounds, arguing that his property was not safe for children.

However, the State Administrative Tribunal rejected his arguments.

Mr Randle describes the situation as "ridiculous". "Our resort was specifically designed as an adult retreat — we've got open-plan rooms with spas in them, we've got unfenced ponds on the property, and we wanted to create a place for people to go and relax without having to worry about three-year-olds running around and destroying their peace," he says.

He said the publicity he got after the SAT ruling was invaluable, sending bookings "through the roof", and more than 1000 people posted comments on the internet supporting his stance.

Despite the SAT ruling, Chimes continues to advertise itself as an adults' retreat, which Mr Randle says he is able to do by becoming a club. Guests must sign up as club members before making a booking.

The WA Tourism Council backs his stance and Attorney-General Christian Porter is also supportive of adults-only accommodation.

Tourism council chief executive Graham Moss says adults-only

accommodation should be encouraged and operators allowed to advertise their premises as such. "There are plenty of resorts that provide facilities for kids and families — why shouldn't there be places specifically for adults," he says.

Meanwhile, Mr Porter is keen to see the law changed to allow adults-only resorts "however, without amendments to the Commonwealth Age Discrimination Act changes to the WA Equal Opportunity Act might achieve very little".

Mr Porter said he had asked Tourism Minister Liz Constable to raise the issue with the Federal Government.

A spokesman for Dr Constable said the Federal Tourism Minister Martin Ferguson had referred the matter to an Investment and Regulatory Reform working group for consideration.

Ms Henderson finds the Government's stance disturbing and believes it is a fundamental question of human rights.

"When the (State Administrative) Tribunal ruled against that resort, it made it quite clear that it did so because the owner was trying to obtain a commercial advantage," she says.

"The legislation is about upholding human rights, not about giving someone a competitive advantage.

"You can't try to get around it by citing safety either, because if something's a risk to kids it could be a risk to older people or anyone else for that matter."

Adelaide mother Sarah Ball and her business partner have started up the Little Lattes website, providing information to parents about child-friendly cafes, restaurants and accommodation in South Australia.

However, she was shocked at how many vitriolic comments about children a story about her website attracted on an online news service.

"I didn't realise there was such a backlash from people about having children in public," Ms Ball said. She was also surprised to find during her research that a many accommodation providers did not want children staying.

"In some cases these were places that I'd thought were child-friendly, but when I rang them, they'd say no, children aren't welcome and we don't want to be known as a place to bring children," Ms Ball said.

Perth appears to be following suit. One Swan Valley winery has a restaurant opening on to a big stretch of grass with no obvious safety hazards in sight.

It appears to be the perfect spot for a family lunch — until you read the sign.

"Unsupervised children will be sold to the circus," it reads. "For the comfort and safety of patrons, we request children are to kindly remain seated."

It's hard to imagine a child happy to remain seated for the duration of leisurely restaurant meal when there's a huge expanse of lawn beckoning.

Then there's the childfree internet forums and social groups that are flourishing across Australia, including Child Free Zone and Childfree Victoria.

Psychologist and social researcher Hugh Mackay believes Australia is becoming more child-unfriendly as a direct consequence of a falling birth rate.

Though the birth rate has recently risen slightly, from 1.76 babies per woman in 2004 to 1.97 in 2009, Dr Mackay believes this is a temporary "blip" and further falls are likely.

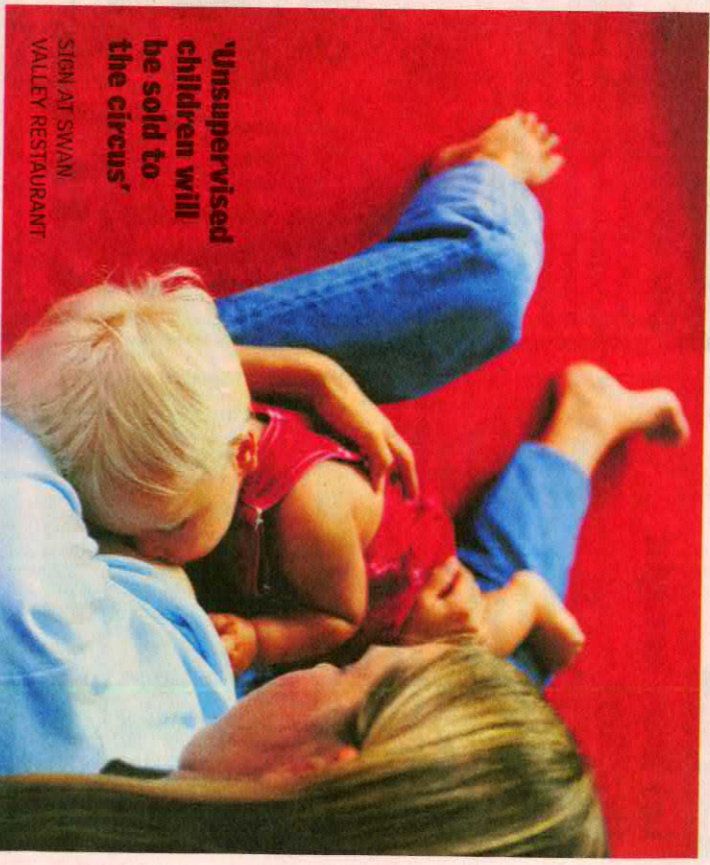
"We're raising at the moment — relative to total population — the smallest generation of children that Australia has ever produced," Dr Mackay says.

"When the birth rate falls, the society at large becomes less child friendly. While the parents themselves are becoming overzealous in their parenting, society at large is starting to lose interest in kids."

"More and more we're seeing the child-free restaurant, the child-free resort and there's even been an application for a child-free apartment block development.

"That's a huge cultural change and it's going to make it quite hard for these kids because they're being overindulged and cosseted by their parents, and yet they move in a society which is less interested in them than Australia has traditionally been."

Agenda



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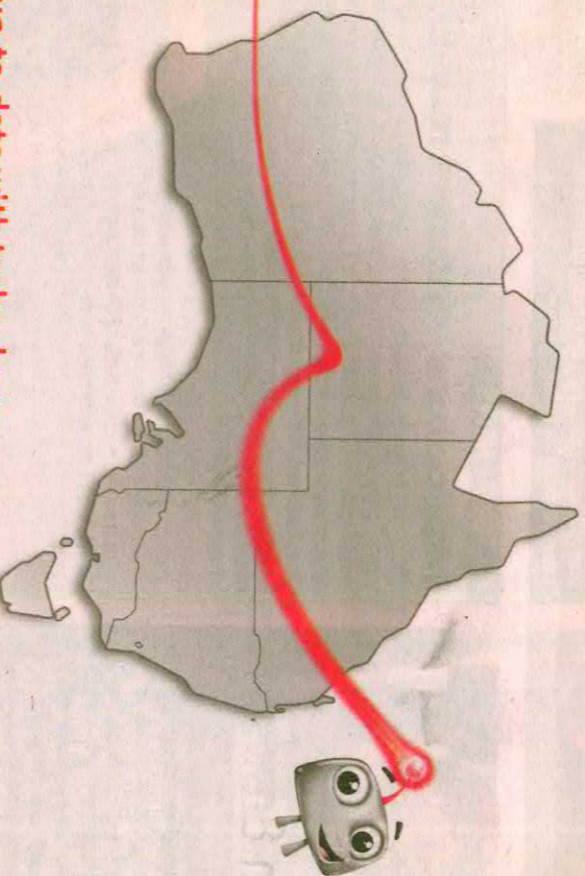
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