

NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

GPO Box 2734, Darwin NT 0801.

Patron: Mr Marshall Perron

Member of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies

July 1997

Dear Members and friends, Again we must apologise for the infrequency of newsletters. Our small committee has been stretched well beyond its limits - and it will shortly become worse when Lynda Cracknell (President & acting Secretary) and her husband Alan (Committee member) move interstate in September. Another committee member has had to withdraw due to ill health, and Marshall Perron our Patron and Cherry Perron our Treasurer are taking an extended holiday and will be unavailable for about four months.

Can we keep the NTVES going? It seems there are several options we can consider.

1. Try to interest some existing/new members who can give time and skills to the task, to take on the vacant office bearer positions - to re-invigorate the membership and develop new strategies for regaining the lost ground;
2. In the absence of office bearers with sufficient time and energy, elect a 'holding' committee who can maintain the society in a very basic form; or
3. Wind up the society.

The existing Committee have met and considered recommendations which will be put to the AGM.

I'm sure no-one wants to see the society wind up altogether. But it will happen unless we have some volunteers prepared to be active committee members and office bearers.

ALL MEMBERS ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND THE AGM. DETAILS BELOW.

AGM - 5pm Tuesday 5 August 1997 Mirambeena Tourist Resort - 64 Cavenagh Street, Darwin

The Annual General Meeting of the NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society will be held on Tuesday 5 August at 5pm at the Mirambeena Resort. **All members are encouraged to attend to help determine the future of the Society.**

The meeting will call for nominations for office bearers for the 97/98 year.

If sufficient positions are filled, the outgoing committee will propose motions for necessary changes to the constitution.

If insufficient positions are filled, the motion will be put for dissolution of the NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

(Full wording of proposed motions provided over page)

AGM - 5 August '97. Motions proposed by the outgoing Committee

1. That the motions for amendments to the constitution (see below) be held over until after election of office bearers, and put forward for consideration after and if sufficient positions are filled. Sufficient positions being defined as a minimum of three members who collectively fill the office bearer positions.
2. That the meeting accept deferral of audited 96/97 records, and the appointment of an auditor for 97/98 pending the outcome of the elections.

Optional Motions - In the event of sufficient positions being filled by election.

1. To amend the objectives following the overturning of the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act by the federal parliament,

remove Article 3.1

“Promote a knowledge and understanding of the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, the Natural Death Act and other related legislation to the members and general community”

and replace with new Article 3.1

“Promote a knowledge and understanding of any legislation which supports the right of a terminally ill person to

- a) refuse extraordinary life support measures
- b) seek assistance from a medically qualified person to voluntarily terminate his or her life in a humane manner”

2. To correct a discrepancy between Article 11.4 and Article 17.2

remove Article 17.2

“A quorum shall consist of **15** members of which at least three are Management Committee members”

and replace with new Article 17.2

“A quorum shall consist of **8** members of which at least three are Management Committee members”

3. To update the wording to reflect new Associations Incorporation legislation

remove Article 29.1

“The winding up of the Association shall be in accordance with the Northern Territory Associations Incorporation Act **1980**”

and replace with new Article 29.1

“The winding up of the Association shall be in accordance with the Northern Territory Associations Incorporation Act **in force at the time**”

Optional Motion - In the event of insufficient positions being filled by election

1. That the Northern Territory Voluntary Euthanasia Society be dissolved in accordance with Article 29, and that the responsibility for such dissolution lie with the available outgoing Committee members and office bearers.

The overturning of the NT voluntary euthanasia legislation

Remember **24 March 1997** for being the night 38 Senators voted in favour of the passage of The Euthanasia Laws Act (Kevin Andrews ‘masterpiece’) which overturned the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, and prevented similar laws from being enacted in Australia’s Territories.

It was the night on which compassion for the suffering of

terminally ill people, and respect for their autonomy, was thrown out the door.

It was the night on which a parliament decreed its citizens who live in the Territories have lesser rights than those who live in the States.

R.I.P Democracy? We hope not. Democracy is one basic thing worth fighting for - with true democracy the humane and fair society we want for ourselves can become a

reality. We must always work towards having parliaments which are representative of the people they serve.

If you would like a list of the Members of the House of Representatives and the Senators who voted for the Andrews bill, send a note to our PO Box and we'll post you a copy.

Nearer to home, the NT elections will soon be with us again. The NTVES has written to all pre-selected CLP and Labour candidates asking whether they support the principle of voluntary euthanasia. We hope to be able to publicise how existing members voted on the RTI bill last time, and the responses of the new candidates, before the election.

Our letter to the new candidates says in part *"Our society remains committed to campaigning for our parliament to support the wishes of the people on this important issue - which means retaining and reactivating the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act. This might become possible if the 'Andrews Act' is repealed or the NT attains Statehood, either of which could occur within the term of the next NT parliament"*.

Politicians depend on the public having a short memory - they think we'll forget all about it before the next election comes around. Help prove them wrong! **Make your next vote a vote for Voluntary Euthanasia. Vote.**

Looking back

Although we've lost the VE law - for now - we're well ahead of where we were before Marshall introduced his world first 'Rights of the Terminally Ill' bill.

People are talking more openly about death and dying.

Palliative care has improved. (But there is still a long way to go)

People are more aware of the NT Natural Death Act. This Act is still in place and allows for any of us to complete an 'Advance Directive' against the use of extraordinary measures to artificially prolong the dying process in the event of a terminal illness. Brochures and declaration forms can be obtained from the NTVES, or the NT Health Services department.

The community is much more aware of what 'Voluntary Euthanasia' is all about. If some were not certain what was being offered when Marshall's bill was originally introduced, we were certainly all well aware of what we were losing by the time Andrews abolished it.

The NT has been featured widely throughout the world for its leading role in introducing Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation. Even though we've lost it for the time being, our initial success lends weight to proponents efforts to introduce similar legislation elsewhere.

Accolade to Marshall Perron

At the conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies in late 1996, Marshall Perron was awarded the George Saba Memorial Medal for his outstanding contribution to the advancement of 'Right to Die' legislation.

We're all delighted that at least Andrews can't take that away!

What's happening elsewhere?

Bogota, Columbia In May, Colombia's highest court handed down a ruling that will effectively make it the only country in the [northern] hemisphere to legalise mercy killings.

In a surprising 6-3 decision, the Constitutional Court ruled that no one can be held criminally responsible for taking the life of terminally ill patients who have provided clear consent.

USA Supreme Court - Thursday, June 26, 1997; -- Terminally ill people do not have a constitutional right to doctor-assisted suicide, the Supreme Court said in a ruling that touches every American family.

The court upheld laws in New York and Washington state that make it a crime for doctors to give life-ending drugs to mentally competent but terminally ill patients who no longer want to live.

[The good news is that this ruling will not prevent other States in the US from passing enabling legislation if they wish]

Oregon, USA. The Death With Dignity Act has been referred back to the voters. for a 'second opinion' The Oregon Death With Dignity Act was passed by electors in November, 1994 with Ballot Measure 16. It has been hung up ever since in the courts due to legal challenges but the end of these may be in sight.

[The innovative 'ballot measures' allowed in Oregon are supposed to allow legislation to be introduced by a form of citizens referendum. On the face of it, a wonderful demonstration of democracy at work. But what a farce when the legislature won't accept the decision of the people, and send it back in the hope of getting a different answer next time around?]

South Australia. South Australia has taken a significant step towards allowing voluntary euthanasia, following a historic vote in the Legislative Council

After lengthy debate, MPs voted 13-8 for a bill supporting the controversial move. SA is now leading the way in introducing right-to-die legislation following the Federal Parliament's decision to overturn similar Northern Territory legislation in March.

But the bill - introduced by Labour MLC Ms Anne Levy - still has major hurdles to overcome, the biggest being the pending State election.

Before going to the Lower House, the bill will be subject to a parliamentary select committee which could take at least 6 months to take submissions and evidence and then to release its findings.

Ms Levy also will amend her bill to ensure a referendum is held if it passes in the Lower House.

Putting it in verse

The following was written by the retiring NT Administrator, former NT Chief Justice Mr Austin Asche and the man who signed the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act into law. He recited the poem at his retirement ceremony in February.

*Free citizens of Australia?
It seems we've been a failure:
Self-government, for us, has proved a farce.
And Canberra gets haughty,
When it thinks we're being naughty
In passing laws that any State can pass.*

*When democracy is guided,
The nation is divided:
Some must impart the sacred truth to others.
Mark carefully the sequel:
When some are less than equal,
The voice that you are hearing is Big Brother's.*

*You must feel so superior
To tell us we're inferior,
A group of yokels just up from the sticks.
It's kind of you to preach to us
Although you seem to each of us
Just sanctimonious patronising pricks.*

Our second verse was provided by a local supporter.

*I was the apple of my fathers's eye
A tall strong man was he
He taught me everything I know
To love, Respect, be strong and free.*

*A man who knew the right from wrong
and believed in rights for all
He was well-respected & certainly loved
My father - he stood tall.*

*Then one day came the deaded news
A fatal disease had struck
The downfall of my fathers life
But we fought and hoped for luck.*

*The years went by & this man we knew
was frail, sick and pale.
Through all our hope & fighting now
we knew this all would fail.*

*He lay so still for many months
Struck down with so much pain
The drip inserted & pills he took
His strength he would never regain.*

*This gentle man in shrunken form
in pain and devastation
has pleaded to release his pain
for months with determination.*

*He begged me "let this pain be gone"
A needle is all it will take
I pleaded to all the Doctors
This decision, they could not make.*

*The pain for us to witness this man
Who once was strong and free
Now tied to a bed in this painful form
Begged to be free with dignity.*

*Is breathing so shallow
the eerie rattle in his chest
this death march, slow and painful
Why not allow him his last request?*

*When the pain is far too hard to bear
and there is no hope left in sight
and a choice is made by the suffering
Let them go and follow the light.*

Sue Saunders 1997

Finally in saying farewell as President of NTVES I include several verses from a poem called "Settle the Question Right" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850 - 1919)

*However the battle is ended,
Though proudly the victor comes,
With flaunting flags and neighing nags
and echoing roll of drums;
Still truth proclaims this motto
In letters of living light
No question is ever settled
Until it is settled right.*

*Let those who have failed take courage,
Though the enemy seem to have won;
If he be in the wrong, though his ranks are strong,
The battle is not yet done.
For sure as the morning follows
The darkest hour of the night,
No question is ever settled
Until it is settled right.*

This will be my last NTVES Newsletter, so farewell to all members and friends - keep the fight going. - **Lynda Cracknell**

President Andy Chapman
Vice President Trish Smith
Treasurer Shirlea McLennan