



# NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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Patron: Mr Marshall Perron  
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## WORLD FEDERATION OF RIGHT TO DIE SOCIETIES

The 16<sup>th</sup> biennial conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies was held in Toronto, Canada, from September 7 to 10, 2006. Speakers included George Felos, attorney for Michael Schiavo in Florida, Lord Joel Joffe of the British House of Lords and Dr Philip Nitschke of Exit International. In his talk, Lord Joffe recalled that in 1936 King George V was euthanased by his physician, Lord Dawson, at an appropriate time to have the announcement of his death appear in *The Times*, rather than in the more lurid evening papers. That same year, a VE bill was defeated in the British Parliament because "doctors know best". Seventy years later, the 4<sup>th</sup> of Lord Joffe's bills was defeated 148 to 100, despite more than three-quarters of the British public being in favour. He vowed to continue introducing VE bills. The conference also featured a film festival which included *The Sea Inside*, *Mademoiselle and the Doctor* and *The Promise* (Lesley Martin's story). The next conference will be held in Cartagena, Colombia from September 18 to 21, 2008.

## 10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIONS

On 22 September 1996, Darwin man Bob Dent became the first person to use the Northern Territory's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*. A year later, the Sunshine Coast Branch of VESQ planted a tree in Bob's memory and each year they have a commemorative meeting in the park near that tree. This year's event was held on 21 September. The following article about the meeting was printed in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 23 September:

As Amanda Vanstone calls for euthanasia laws, Coast supporters rally in memory of Bob Dent, the first man to die legally in Australia

10 years on and many are still battling for the right to die with a little dignity

TEN years ago this week, a terminally-ill man in Darwin chose to take his own life. But he did it legally. Freedom of Choice supporters, in favour of voluntary euthanasia, staged a Memorial Day at Cotton Tree for that man, Bob Dent.

Bob was the first person in the world to die using the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act which legalised euthanasia in the Northern Territory on July 1, 1996. The Act was then overturned on March 15, 1997. Bob's wife, Judy, attended the day to re-iterate her husband's right to die with dignity at a time of his choosing. Bob was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1991, and after surviving numerous operations, he had lost 25kg and was forced to wear a catheter and leg bag and was suffering severe pain when he chose to die on September 22, 1996, she said.

"Even if I didn't believe in voluntary euthanasia, I would still have let him go ahead with it because of the state he was in and the pain he was suffering," Judy said.

Gold Coast bowel-cancer sufferer Nancy Crick also refused to live with her terminal illness, choosing to die surrounded by 21 family and friends on May 22, 2002. Tewanin woman Bron Norman, daughter of Australian author Nancy Cato, witnessed Nancy's death.

"People need to realise death is a valid option when life is unbearable," she said.

"I was drawn to Nancy because my mother's name was Nancy and she died in 2000 after a month of severe pain and I could do nothing to help her. I failed my mother and I wanted to help Nancy ... it didn't worry me a bit if I was breaking the law."

She said Nancy Crick was "very ill" and just 30kg when she decided to take her life.

Bron described Nancy as a "motherly" figure who, despite her pain, always took time to greet her guests with a "hug and a kiss and offered to make them a cup of tea".

"On her final night, she had all her good friends there, and Nancy was being the hostess and then at 8pm she said she was going to bed and kissed everyone, saying 'good night', not 'good bye'," she said. Bron said rather than sad, Nancy's friends felt a sense of triumph that this frail, elderly lady had taken control of her life by ending it.

Yesterday, a senior federal government minister used the 10-year anniversary to call for the practice to be sanctioned across the country.

Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone says her views on assisted suicide for the terminally ill have not changed since Mr Dent died.

Senator Vanstone said people close to death should be able to choose how they go.

"I think people should have the choice to take the final step of their life - that is to die - with some dignity and grace. We need euthanasia laws.

"There's a fine line between what keeps someone calm and comfortable and what hastens their death and I don't think the doctors who are prepared to keep someone calm and comfortable should ever be at risk and we need laws that make that clear to protect them as well."

But she did not condone people breaking the law to help end someone's life.

I think in the area of euthanasia there's a (compulsion) for some to think that it might be a moral thing to do to help someone against the law and I don't think it is," she said.

"It is a moral position to break the law and take the consequences when you disagree with it and Nelson Mandela's a good example of that. Mahatma Ghandi's another example. But never confuse that with someone who chooses to break the law and hides the fact that they've done it - to somehow hide from the police and others what you've done."

-SAM BENDER and AAP

The following editorial and report of Senator Vanstone's position also appeared in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 23 Sept.

IN OUR OPINION

## **Time for mercy on euthanasia**

AMANDA Vanstone has never been hailed for her compassion but she certainly makes some valid points in calling for euthanasia laws in Australia.

Ten years after Australia's first legal voluntary euthanasia of cancer sufferer Bob Dent in the Northern Territory, Mrs Vanstone yesterday called for the right for people to choose how they go to be enshrined in legislation.

"I think someone who's facing the end of their life should have the choice as to how that proceeds," she said.

"I think people should have the choice to take the final step of their life - that is to die - with some dignity...

"We need euthanasia laws. There are doctors who are quite sensible who can see someone very near the end of their life and make sure that they are calm and comfortable during that time.

"There's a fine line between what keeps someone calm and comfortable and what hastens their death and I don't think the doctors who are prepared to keep someone calm and comfortable should ever be at risk and we need laws that make that clear to protect them as well."

The reality is that euthanasia is happening every day in our hospitals, nursing homes and at private homes.

Those involved should be able to proceed, as long as it is in the best interests of the person concerned, without fear of prosecution.

## **Vanstone's stand praised**

AUSTRALIA'S leading voluntary euthanasia advocate has praised a senior federal government minister's support for law-breaking on moral grounds.

Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone has used the 10th anniversary of Australia's first legal voluntary euthanasia death in the Northern Territory to renew calls for the sanctioning of the practice. She says her views on assisted suicide for the terminally ill have not changed since 66-year-old cancer sufferer Bob Dent died in the NT a decade ago.

In September 1996, Mr Dent, who had prostate cancer, was the first person to make use of the Territory's laws sanctioning assisted suicide.

Just six months later federal parliament voted to overturn them.

Senator Vanstone said yesterday people close to death should be able to choose how they go. But she also said it was "honourable" to break the law and help those wanting to die.

"To oppose a law, to break it and take the consequences, is an honourable course," she said.

-AAP

## **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 'Remembering ROTI' Conference**

Exit International and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New South Wales co-hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary 'Remembering ROTI (Rights of the Terminally Ill)' Conference in Sydney on Bob Dent Day. After the welcome by Dr Philip Nitschke (Exit) and Mr Kep Enderby (VESNSW), Marshall Perron gave a fascinating account of his preparation of ROTI to ensure that it would pass in the NT Legislative Assembly. Dr Philip Nitschke then spoke about Living and Dying under ROTI, followed by Dr Marion Maddox – the 'Euthanasia No Campaign' (via video).

South Australian Democrats MP, Hon Sandra Kanck, then launched Dr Nitschke's controversial new *Peaceful Pill Handbook*. Unfortunately, very few books were available for viewing because the shipment from the USA where the book was published, was seized by Australian customs at Brisbane Airport on

the basis of incitement to suicide. The next day, authorities in Canberra decided that the book should be withheld, pending appeal.

Next, Senator Amanda Vanstone (Lib)(via audio tape), Senator Bob Brown (Greens – via video), Hon Dr Carmen Lawrence (ALP) and Senator Lyn Allison (Dem) all reiterated their support for VE.

After lunch, nearly 200 attendees marched around the Chatswood shopping precinct resplendent in their purple sashes declaring “My Life My Choice”. Patrons at an outdoor café applauded as the VE supporters marched past.

After the march, there was a panel discussion with relatives of 3 of the 4 people who used ROTI. Hon Sandra Kanck then spoke about Challenging the Suicide Materials Crimes Act. The afternoon concluded with the presentation of Condolence Books to Exit chapter leaders. Signatures will be collected in these books in preparation for the bus ride to Canberra for the National Day of Shame on 26 March 2007 marking 10 years since Kevin Andrews’ Euthanasia Laws Bill was passed.

All VE supporters are invited to go on the pilgrimage to Canberra next March.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENT: DO NOT RESUSCITATE**

Do Not Resuscitate is a film about three very different people who are facing their mortality. Because of their extreme suffering, they want the right to determine when and how to die. But in Australia, assisting them to die is illegal and carries a 14 year jail sentence. This two part series is a profound exploration of how they and their loved ones deal with the stark reality of their pending death and the obstacles they face.

The two parts are scheduled to be shown on the SBS programme ‘Storyline Australia’ on 23 Nov and 30 Nov at 8:30 pm. However, an inquest has not yet been completed and this may force SBS to defer the showing of this film.

#### **NTVES Annual General Meeting**

The NTVES AGM was held on 5 August 2006 and the following office bearers were elected unopposed:

<i>President</i>	J Dent
<i>Vice-President</i>	V Czernezkyj
<i>Secretary</i>	E A Mason
<i>Treasurer</i>	S McKerrow
<i>Public Officer</i>	S McKerrow