



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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Member of World Federation of Right to Die Societies

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Newsletter

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SENATOR BOB BROWN'S BILL

Senator Brown's Bill is expected to be debated in the Senate soon. We can convey our feelings on this matter by writing to Senator Trish Crossin (PO Box 946 Palmerston NT 0831) and Senator Nigel Scullion (1/229 McMillans Road Jingili NT 0810). The following letter is an example of what could be written.

"I write to urge you to support the private member's *Restoring Territory Rights (Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation) Bill 2008* currently before the Senate.

As you will be aware the bill is a redraft of one earlier introduced by Senator Brown to reflect the recommendations of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

The bill no longer proposes to restore a right to voluntary euthanasia under the NT *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995*. It intends only to return to the Territories the power to address voluntary euthanasia should their Legislative Assembly decide to do so.

As demonstrated by the recent Senate Committee inquiry and earlier parliamentary debate, many MP's have difficulty separating the parliamentary / constitutional issues from the human rights issues when considering this matter.

I submit the following brief statement on each for your consideration.

The role of the Senate as the 'States House' was intended to protect the less populous jurisdictions from being unfairly treated federally. That each of the States should have equal authority to govern their citizens was never in question.

The constitutional authority of Federal Parliament to overturn legislation passed by a Territory or to withdraw legislative powers from a Territory is not disputed; however, questions of equity should prevent the use of such powers except in circumstances of national crisis.

Currently 550,000 Australians residing in the Territories have policy on voluntary euthanasia determined for them by 218 federal politicians for whom they cannot vote. The other twenty million citizens in this Federation are not in that situation.

By returning to the Territories the powers that States have, Sen. Brown's bill would correct that inequity.

Voluntary euthanasia (VE) laws have been operating in democratic countries for over a decade now without the calamitous events predicted by churches and right to life groups. Oregon in the United States has allowed medical assistance to die since 1998, The Netherlands and Belgium since 2002. The US state

of Washington approved the practice on 4th November 2008. Switzerland has permitted assisted suicide in certain circumstances for several decades.

Polls show a massive majority of Australians believe the hopelessly ill should have a legal right to access the means to die peacefully at a time they choose if their suffering becomes unbearable.

Currently four elderly Australians take their own life every week, most of them violently. Advances in medicine enabling us to keep an ever decaying body alive will drive even more to do so in future. Australians know this, hence the 80% who support a legalised right to die.

Private members bills to permit VE have been introduced in SA, WA, NSW and Victoria, the most recent introduced on the 4th November. While to date none of those bills have been passed, the activity shows VE is very much on the public agenda. It is only a matter of time before an Australian Parliament addresses the will of the public on this human rights issue.

I have no idea when or if any Territory Legislative Assembly would consider voluntary euthanasia legislation if the power to do so is restored. My appeal to you is to support the right of Australians living in the Territories to elect their own representatives to decide such matters for themselves.”

[If you do write and get a reply that is more than an acknowledgement of receipt of your letter, please send copies of both letters to Judy for NTVES records. Thank you.]

EUTHANASIA DECRIMINALISED IN LUXEMBOURG

Radio Netherlands Worldwide reported 17 March 2009

Luxembourg has become the third European Union country, after the Netherlands and Belgium, to decriminalise euthanasia. Terminally ill people will be able to have their lives ended after receiving the approval of two doctors and a panel of experts.

Last year, Luxembourg became embroiled in a constitutional crisis when Grand Duke Henri refused to sign the euthanasia bill into law. The crisis led to his power being curtailed and laws no longer need to be signed by him.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NTVES AGM will be held on Saturday 8th August 2009 at 10:00am in Malarndirri McCarthy's office. Please attend. Further details will be posted in July.

Dying with Dignity Victoria has kindly offered to host the 18th biennial conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies in Melbourne in September 2010. The World Federation of Right to Die Societies' newsletter can be read at www.worldrtd.net.

Members of VES Queensland have voted to change their name to Dying with Dignity Queensland, joining Tasmania and Victoria in the appellation.

NEWS FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Parliament of South Australia has before it two bills relating to euthanasia. Frances Coombe of SAVES prepared this comparison of the bills.

What is in the Such Bill?

- a request for euthanasia can come only voluntarily from an adult person of sound mind
- the adult must be in the terminal phase of a terminal illness *and*
- have intolerable pain that cannot be relieved by methods that the person finds acceptable
- a request may not be made before the illness occurs
- the person must be examined by two independent doctors and the doctors must agree that the request is justified by the medical evidence
- the sufferer must be fully informed about his/her illness, including palliative care and all possible treatments and their likely outcomes
- two adult witnesses are required and a “cooling off” period of 48 hours must occur after a certificate of confirmation is completed by the doctor
- the request may be withdrawn at any time
- all prescribed documentation must be completed and forwarded to the State Coroner who will provide an annual report to Parliament

- medication will be prescribed for ingestion by the person or administration by the doctor
- any person may refuse to be involved in the process
- a doctor, pharmacist or health care provider who provides assistance in accordance with the provisions of the Bill will not be the subject of civil or criminal action

What is in the Parnell Bill?

- a request for euthanasia can come only voluntarily from an adult person of sound mind
- the adult must be in the terminal phase of a terminal illness *and*
- have intolerable pain that cannot be relieved by methods that the person finds acceptable
- a request may not be made before the illness occurs
- the person must be examined by two independent doctors and the doctors must agree that the request is justified by the medical evidence
- the sufferer must be fully informed about his/her illness, including palliative care and all possible treatments and their likely outcomes
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- medication will be prescribed for ingestion by the person or administration by the doctor
- any person may refuse to be involved in the process
- a doctor, pharmacist or health care provider who provides assistance in accordance with the provisions of the Bill will not be the subject of civil or criminal act

PRESS RELEASE

19 FEBRUARY 2009

CHRISTIANS SUPPORTING CHOICE FOR VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA

A new group of **Christians who believe that, as a demonstration of love and compassion, those with a terminal or hopeless illness should have the option of a pain-free, peaceful and dignified death with legal voluntary euthanasia**, has been formed.

Spokesperson for the group, Ian Wood, said **Voluntary euthanasia laws are working responsibly in five jurisdictions around the world. There is no rational reason for our MPs to oppose the two Bills now before them, only ideological obstructionism.**

The aim of the group is to show all Members of Parliament there are Christians who DO support choice for voluntary euthanasia, holding it to be consistent with Jesus' message of love and compassion.

The Christian Bible is often used to support opposition to change, just as it was used in the past to resist the abolition of slavery, resist university education for women, resist the vote for women, and as proof that Earth was the centre of the universe

History has shown this use of the Bible to be inappropriate. **Christians supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia believe the time has now come to put love and compassion for a fellow human ahead of theological differences of opinion.**

There is absolutely no evidence in reports from Netherlands and Oregon to support the "slippery slope" and "playing God", fear-mongering reasons put forward by opponents of change to voluntary euthanasia law.

There are ample safeguards, and strong penalties for abusing them, in the proposed Bills. It must be stressed the proposed legislation only applies to those with a terminal or hopeless illness – not to someone who is merely depressed.

Members of Parliament need to remember that morally and ethically their vote should reflect the views of their electorate. 81% of South Australians agree that voluntary euthanasia should be a legal option or choice for a person suffering a hopeless illness (Newspoll 2007). Newspoll also showed that people who claim to have a religion still strongly support the right of doctors to provide a lethal dose (74%).

Rev. Trevor Bensch, former Minister at North Adelaide Baptist Church, and currently a Baptist hospital chaplain, has been the catalyst for the formation of the new group, **Christians supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia**, after his letter supporting choice for voluntary euthanasia was quoted in Parliament by Hon Mark Parnell.

Christians who agree with our mission are urged to contact **Christians supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia**.

Please write to Ian Wood, 429 Anzac Road, Port Pirie, or email ChristiansforVE@westnet.com.au and find out how we intend to strongly convey this message to our politicians and just how easy it will be for you to take part.

Approved by Rev. Trevor Bensch and fellow Christian Ian Wood.

March 2009 Please Note: We are delighted Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia is receiving many expressions of support from non-Christians and ex-Christians.

We have therefore decided to divide membership into two parts

- Christian voters in South Australia
- Other support throughout Australia and overseas