



# NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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## AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETIES CONFERENCE

The South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (SAVES) organised a meeting of delegates from all Australian Voluntary Euthanasia and Dying with Dignity groups held over 2 1/2 days from 23 to 25 October 2009. NTVES was represented by Judy Dent. Topics discussed included recent VE Bills, barriers to passage of VE legislation, the laws and palliative care around the world, medicine and euthanasia, religion and euthanasia, funding considerations, motivating the masses and getting bills into Parliament and advancing them. Following is what Judy had to say about the barriers to passage of VE legislation in the NT.

“When Marshall Perron proposed the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* legislation, there was public support in the form of a community group known as Operation TIAP which campaigned for the legislation. Some of that group formed the Northern Territory Voluntary Euthanasia Society, the first such society incorporated AFTER voluntary euthanasia legislation was passed. Others of the group decided that the job was done and there was no need to join a VE society. The ROTI legislation was passed in 1995 and became usable on 1 July 1996. It survived a challenge in the NT Supreme Court and a repeal attempt in the NT Parliament in its first two months. Unfortunately, it did not survive the overturning legislation known as the *Euthanasia Laws Bill* proposed as a private member’s bill by Kevin Andrews and pushed through Federal Parliament with the help of then Prime Minister John Howard.

By July 1997, it seemed as if NTVES itself would not survive. The NT is a large area with a small population. Apathy had overtaken many previously supportive people. The general feeling was “What’s the point of continuing? The Feds have wiped out our law and made us second-class citizens anyway.”

But we did survive, just. We have about 20 NT members and a few from other areas. We are really just in a holding pattern because of Kevin Andrews’ bill. If we attempt to discuss VE with our politicians, we are given the brush-off; they use Kevin’s shield to hide their thoughts on the subject (if they have any).

We did get responses in 1997 and 2001 but only 5 of those who then supported VE are still in politics. Current Chief Minister Paul Henderson said in May 2001 “I am on the

public record as supporting the principle of voluntary euthanasia at both the 1997 election as the ALP candidate for Nightcliff and also the 1999 Wanguri by-election.” However, just a few months ago he said “I was in favour of ROTI in 1995 but now we have the Hospice, we don’t need VE.” Clare Martin did a similar about-face when she became leader too. I guess they both took lessons from Mark Latham who changed from ‘for’ to ‘against’ when he became leader.

So the barriers to passing VE legislation in the NT are the same as in the States

- not enough eager enthusiastic people to rally for the cause
- politicians who think they know better and are afraid of upsetting the churches rather than representing the people who elected them.

But we (and the ACT) have the added barrier of *The Euthanasia Laws Bill* which prohibits our legislative assembly from enacting VE laws. I appeal to the state societies to deluge their Senators with letters supporting the passage of Bob Brown’s amended bill which would at least put the citizens of the territories on an equal footing with the rest of Australia’s citizens. When that bill is passed, then we can commence our lobbying for a new Rights of the Terminally Ill Act. If Bob Brown’s bill is not passed, then the citizens of the NT have to wait for statehood to restore their rights.”

One formal proposal was put to the meeting – to form a national coalition; this was accepted unanimously. The next meeting is on 5 October 2010, immediately preceding the World Federation conference.

## **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ELECTION**

Prior to the recent SA election, the president of SAVES wrote to the other Australian VE groups requesting a donation to assist with a campaign to try to elect more parliamentarians who would vote in favour of a VE/PAD bill. Mark Parnell’s Bill was defeated by such a small margin (11-9). He has indicated his intention to reintroduce a bill in 2010 stating “The vast majority of South Australians want voluntary euthanasia law reform. I strongly believe it’s just a matter of time before compassionate legislation is passed in our state.” The NTVES committee decided to contribute \$1000 to the cause in the spirit of the national cooperation agreed upon at the October meeting.

Now that the election results have been finalised, SAVES has calculated that the House of Assembly (Lower House) has 11 supportive members, 7 opposed, 10 not declaring a position and 19 non-responders; the Legislative Council has 12 supportive, 9 opposed and 1 non-responder. Frances Coombe, President of SAVES, says ” It’s looking good for the Upper House where Mark (Parnell) is to introduce another Bill, around May he

has said. It's harder to tell for the Lower House – we know some of the non response & not declaring would be supportive but some opposed of course, hard to say for certain. There will most likely be another Bill introduced there by Bob Such. Another MP is also hopeful of introducing a different Bill.

I know that people can think different Bills aren't good but it has to be seen as a plus. It indicates the strong support amongst many MPs. This is a momentum that won't be stopped."

## **TASMANIAN ELECTION**

Final results for Tasmania show Liberals have won 10 seats, Labor 10 seats and the Greens 5 seats. Five out of the seven who voted for the 2009 Dying with Dignity Bill have retained their seats but unfortunately the very supportive Ross Butler lost . It will be interesting to see what happens in Tasmania as neither major party can rule without the support of the Greens.

## **BILL FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Robin Chapple MLC has reiterated his intention of introducing the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2009 into parliament this year. The full bill can be seen at <http://www.robinchapple.org.au/node/142>

Mr Chapple says "I realise this is a very restrictive Bill. However, it was my intention to draft a restrictive Bill. This is because a restrictive law has the best chance of being passed by the current Western Australian Parliament. I know many readers will be disappointed that this Bill does not go further, does not apply to more people and does not allow for administration of euthanasia by a person other than a medical practitioner. But this law is a good start, and a step in the right direction."

## **FIRST NOTICE NTVES AGM**

The AGM is to be held on Saturday 7 August 2010 at Malarndirri Mc Carthy's office, Casuarina Village, at 10 am. Please mark the date in your diary.

NTVES appreciates being able to use the facilities of COTA(NT) and Darwin Senior Citizens at Spillett House to print this newsletter.

## **WORLD FEDERATION OF RIGHT TO DIE SOCIETIES CONFERENCE**

It is with the greatest of pleasure that Dying With Dignity Victoria invites delegates to the World Federation of Right To Die Societies biennial global conference in Melbourne, Australia. As a biennial conference, it is the premiere event on the global Dying With Dignity calendar...a rare occasion to meet with our friends and colleagues from around the world to share the latest in news, principles, practices and routes to reform.

The theme of this year's conference is Bridging Principles and Practice. Many jurisdictions have yet to achieve legislative reform (ours is no exception) despite ongoing concerted effort. Therefore, the conference will focus on bridging principles and practices that help initiate and stimulate informed, respectful and rational debate amongst the public, legislators, medical care providers and other important stakeholders and our leadership of and participation in it.

What are best practices in assisted dying for those suffering unrelievable torture of an end-of-life illness? How can we best engage relevant stakeholders and work together with them towards reform? Are health care practitioners well-informed in matters of end-of-life suffering, care and options and can we realistically contribute to improvements? How might we leverage the energy, knowledge, skills and experience of our network to create a desirable reform trajectory?

As you are probably only too aware, it is costly to operate a global conference, and for this conference there is a delegate registration fee for all delegates except the Board. Despite the delegate fee, which we have taken every effort to keep as low as possible for a substantial event such as this, significant funds have been contributed by our Society, and we are also deeply indebted to Dying With Dignity NSW, the Estate of Dr Clem Jones AO, and to the WF Board, for generous contributions towards costs. We hope that this revised financial model will serve as a framework that may allow smaller societies as well as more financial ones to host WF conferences in the future.

I extend a warm invitation to World Federation members to join with your friends and colleagues in Melbourne to continue working towards a better range of end-of-life communities. Health care professionals, ethicists, policy makers, legislators, and the general public are also invited to attend the Public Symposium Day. Details about the conference, and Melbourne, are available at [www.dwdv.org.au/WF2010/](http://www.dwdv.org.au/WF2010/) We will continue to provide more detailed information about the conference over the coming months. The Committee of Dying With Dignity Victoria looks forward to greeting you in October.

Neil Francis  
DWDV President and CEO  
Conference Chair