



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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Newsletter

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Community Groups and Human Rights Advocates Launch Voluntary Euthanasia Party

The Voluntary Euthanasia Party (VEP) brings together civil rights organisations, high profile euthanasia advocates and community supporters to make voluntary euthanasia a central issue at the 14 September Federal election.

According to Dr Philip Nitschke of Exit International, “The Voluntary Euthanasia Party has come together at the right time to build on the growing momentum of support within the community and across the political spectrum more broadly.”

In 1996 and 1997, Dr Nitschke assisted with the deaths of four terminally ill patients under the Northern Territory’s *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*. This compassionate piece of legislation was overturned by the passage of the *Euthanasia Laws Bill* in Federal Parliament in March 1997. Since then, Exit International and the state and territory Dying with Dignity and VE societies have lobbied for VE law reform.

Mr Richard Mills, President of Dying with Dignity NSW and long-term advocate for this cause said, “VEP has a real opportunity to make sure that no candidate is elected in September without addressing our issue.”

VEP founder, Corey McCann, said that the party had been created as a means of ensuring that one’s right to a peaceful death is established in law. Australia is signatory to the International Convention on Human Rights. Control over how one dies is fundamental and consistent with human rights domestically and with our obligations internationally.

To date, legislative challenges for voluntary euthanasia have taken place at state level. The VEP seeks to give clear national political voice to the 85% of Australians who support VE. It is expected that votes for the party could determine the outcome in several marginal seats and be competitive at the Senate level. Candidates are expected for all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory.

Northern Territory

Senator Richard Di Natale's Bill *Restoring Territory Rights (Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation) 2012* had its second reading in November and was sent to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. This bill would not revive the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* but would allow the NT Legislative Assembly to enact VE legislation again. As the 2012 bill is the same as former Senator Bob Brown's 2008 bill, the committee said they would not call for submissions or conduct an enquiry on this bill, referring instead to their 2008 report. In an interview on ABC radio, NT parliamentary Speaker Kezia Purick said the majority of Territorians want their VE law back and local politicians are also thawing on the issue. She asked Territorians to lobby their Federal representatives so that Senator Di Natale's bill is passed.

South Australia

The Hon Bob Such has presented to the SA parliament his sixth attempt to get a Voluntary Euthanasia law passed. This time he put the draft of his *Ending Life with Dignity Bill 2013* out for consultation. Representatives from advocacy groups including doctors, nurses, lawyers, youth, Christians and SA Voluntary Euthanasia Society made suggestions to make the proposed law more likely to be voted in. At the second reading of the bill in parliament he said, among other things, the following:

“People have asked me, 'Why am I doing this?' Well, I am doing it for one simple reason: compassion for my fellow human beings who are suffering unbearably as a result of a terminal illness. Just to clarify matters, in the bill the wording 'terminal phase' has been deleted because you are either terminally ill or you are not. The advice of a professor of law and the specialists was that they thought it better just to say that it is a 'terminal illness', and I agree, so that is expressed in the bill.

Now, I will not transgress by getting into a bill that I intend to introduce in relation to palliative care. I do not know whether people realise it or not, but under that act it is possible to end a person's life without their consent and that is happening in South Australia right now. They are people in a coma, people in a vegetative state, and if a medical practitioner and the relative or guardian agrees, that person can have their life ended. Yet, they are people who have no say in it; they are in a coma. My bill is talking about people who do have a say; who want to end their life because they are in unbearable pain.

I urge members to look closely at what this new bill contains. It has had very skilful drafting from parliamentary counsel who have spent a lot of time rejigging this bill and reworking it to create a new bill based on the best information and advice we can get. I believe this bill is the one that will deliver reasonable opportunity to those who are suffering unbearably, who cannot bear to live any longer and should be allowed to die in dignity, not in screaming agony for days and weeks on end. I urge members to seriously consider this bill and to ask their constituents if they have any doubt about whether they support it.”

Maybe 2013 is the year SA will get VE legislation.

Tasmania

Premier Lara Giddings and Leader of the Tasmanian Greens Nick McKim have released a discussion paper that outlines and seeks comment on a proposed framework for “voluntary assisted dying”. The paper states a bill will be introduced in the Tasmanian Parliament in 2013. This bill may be the first to be passed since the Northern Territory legislation in 1995. That law was overturned by the federal government in 1997. Persistent and strong public support coupled with a better understanding how such a regime could work means that change is inevitable. The focus on carefully addressing concerns about safeguards may mean that Tasmania becomes the first Australian jurisdiction (since the NT in 1995) to legalise VE.

New South Wales

Greens MP Cate Faehrmann and Dying with Dignity New South Wales are running a series of forums throughout regional NSW to explain her proposed voluntary euthanasia law modelled on the NT’s *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*. Premier Barry O’Farrell said he would allow a conscience vote if so-called right to die laws are debated in Parliament this year. Ms Faehrmann has launched a photo book and an online video promoting voluntary euthanasia as part of her campaign. The video features Loredana Alessio-Mulhall who is in the advanced stage of multiple sclerosis and wants law reform so she can die at a time of her choosing. Ms Faehrmann said, “I am helping Loredana tell her story because she represents a growing movement of people who are experiencing first-hand how cruel our laws can be.”

Latest announcement says Greens MP Cate Faehrmann’s *Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill* will be jointly sponsored in the Lower House by Greens Member for Balmain Jamie Parker, Independent Member for Sydney Alex Greenwich and Independent Member for Lake Macquarie Greg Piper.

The bill will be debated in the Upper House in early May. If successful there, the team will work together to ensure its passage through the Lower House to become law.

Independent Member for Sydney Alex Greenwich said: “The reform is important to families across NSW. I am sure all MPs will consult respectfully with their electorates, experts, and particularly people with terminal illnesses whose pain and suffering can no longer be alleviated.”

Greens MP Cate Faehrmann said: “This issue well and truly crosses the political divide. I’m committed to working with all MPs in the coming weeks to give this much-needed reform its best ever chance of success.”

Greens Member for Balmain Jamie Parker said: “If we want to be a caring society, we need to do something about the fact that our current laws allow some people to suffer

terribly at the end of their lives. Terminally ill adults who are suffering intolerably should have the right to an assisted death if that is their wish – this is about personal choice.”

Independent Member for Lake Macquarie Greg Piper said: “As a mature educated society, I believe that we should be able to accept the right of a person to determine the time of their own death, when they freely and with sound mind, choose to do so on the basis that due to illness and suffering, their life affords little or no quality of life, and is no longer bearable to them. With appropriate legislative and societal checks and balances, voluntary euthanasia would respect a person’s right to self- determine this most important part of their life; it would allow a choice to die with dignity.”

Quebec

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are illegal in Canada under the Federal Criminal Code but if it is labelled ‘medical assistance to die’ it becomes a health issue. Quebec, as a Province, has the power to legislate on matters of health. The government proposes to introduce a bill that would provide for the right to doctor assisted suicide for terminally ill adults. According to opinion polls, the bill has the support of 86% of Quebecers. In 2006 Quebec’s medical association began a lengthy study of appropriate end-of-life care. In 2010 Quebec’s National Assembly appointed an all-party select committee that deliberated for two years. Its 178 page report recommended that medically assisted dying be made legal. It is to be hoped that the final step in this long process will be the passage of Quebec’s own right to die law, the first in Canada.

World Federation of Right to Die Societies Conference

The next conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies will be hosted by Final Exit Network and ERGO and is taking place from 17-21 September 2014 in Chicago, USA at the Embassy Suites Downtown/Lakefront Hotel.

The FEN-WF conference planning committee is creating an inspiring schedule with world-class speakers in the RTD movement. With the theme "Dignity, Control, Choice - Around the World," the committee is focusing on leaders who work on the front lines of legal and philosophical right to die issues throughout the world.

Tours will be available on September 21 after the conference. For further information and early registration see the special website which will open in May 2013.

NTVES AGM

The AGM will be held at 10am on 10 August 2013 at 40 Wangalara St, Tiwi. The agenda and minutes of 2012 AGM will be sent out in July. Please renew your membership before the meeting.

