

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose of the Bill**

1.1 On 12 March 2008, the Senate referred the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 (Bill) to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for inquiry and report by 1 May 2008. On 18 March 2008, the Senate agreed to extend the reporting date to 23 June 2008.

1.2 The Bill, a private senator's bill introduced by Senator Bob Brown, proposes to repeal the *Euthanasia Laws Act 1997* (Cth) and thereby allow the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and Norfolk Island to make legislation permitting voluntary euthanasia. It also proposes to revive the Northern Territory *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995*.

### **Conduct of the inquiry**

1.3 The committee advertised the inquiry in *The Australian* newspaper on 26 March 2008. Details of the inquiry, the Bill and associated documents were placed on the committee's website. The committee also wrote to over 85 organisations and individuals inviting submissions by 9 April 2008.

1.4 The committee received over 1800 submissions. These are listed at Appendix 1. A list of submissions was placed on the committee's website. However, not all submissions were published on the committee's website. This was due to the large number of submissions received, and the resources required to publish those submissions. The majority of submissions received merely expressed a short statement in favour of, or opposing, the Bill. While some submitters requested confidentiality, all public submissions are available to the general public and can be provided upon request made to the committee secretariat.

1.5 The committee held public hearings in Darwin on 14 April 2008 and in Sydney on 16 April 2008. A list of witnesses who appeared at the hearings is at Appendix 2 and copies of the Hansard transcript are available through the Internet at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

### **Acknowledgement**

1.6 The committee thanks those organisations and individuals who made submissions and gave evidence at the public hearing.

### **Scope of the report**

1.7 Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Bill and its background. The next two chapters contain a summary of the main arguments for and against the Bill as raised

during the committee's inquiry: Chapter 3 considers legal and constitutional policy issues and Chapter 4 canvasses the key arguments for and against legalising voluntary euthanasia. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the views of committee members, along with the Chair's findings and recommendations. Detailed comments provided by various members of the committee, and participating Senators, follow these chapters.

### **Note on references**

1.8 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the committee, not to a bound volume. References to Committee Hansard are to the proof Hansard: page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard.