

SUBMISSION TO SUPPORT A BILL FOR AN ACT TO REPEAL THE EUTHANASIA LAWS ACT 1997

I list below all the reasons I have for supporting the passage of Senator Bob Brown's Bill to REPEAL the Euthanasia Laws Act 1997. I then give a personal case history in detail in support of my submission.

- In my view, Parliament should not be able to legislate to prevent individuals who are painfully terminally ill, and who are of sound mind, from making choices on how and when they die. Parliamentarians have prejudices according to their religion and upbringing and are not equipped to be objective nor are they medically qualified people (generally) to make **personal** choices for large numbers of people affecting such fundamental issues as life and death. The previous Act was passed by only a majority of four votes in the Senate by such people. How unfair is that?
- Various regulated opinion polls taken in this century have demonstrated around 70% of Australians support the concept of voluntary euthanasia. Parliaments in other countries have made assisted suicide legal and it has not led to a mass exodus of the terminally ill. In fact it has been patently demonstrated that terminally ill patients who know they have the legal right to commit suicide **at the time of their choosing, and the means to do so**, have found their quality of life, at the end of their life, has demonstrably increased. This has been shown on our TV in documentary films. If parliamentarians have ever sat with an animal at the veterinary surgeon's premises, they will know how beautiful and peaceful the end can be for an animal in great pain. We choose to deal with people differently. Voluntary euthanasia is an act of caring requiring compassion and courage.
- It is also well documented, and has been shown on TV here too, that currently Australians are going to extraordinary and undignified lengths, to obtain Nembutal sometimes from veterinary supplies in Mexico, to achieve the right to have a peaceful end when they know they are terminally ill and should not in fact be travelling.
- Medical practitioners are put in the most insidious position under the current legislation. If the Act was repealed and replaced, matters could be openly and sensibly discussed by and for all parties.
- Palliative care involving opiates is often cited as an alternative to voluntary euthanasia. Most people don't realise that these drugs, especially morphine, can cause constipation the like of which is comparable with the pain of the terminal disease. I suggest interested parties Google "morphine and constipation" to read first-hand case histories. As a nurse who had to retire from that field (the rules then) on marriage 40 years ago, I nursed in a geriatric hospital and saw this first hand. Religious people repeat clichés regarding palliative care without knowing anything about it. Would a loving God want undue suffering to the least able people to bear it?
- There are going to be huge numbers of senior citizens living longer who will reach their 80s and 90s when their bodies degenerate and pain could wipe out any quality of life. In fact this is

happening now and these people absolutely hate to call on their families to **constantly support** them in everyday functions of life. It is very expensive and is reducing the quality of life for many people in a family. The "Guardian Weekly" published two months ago in a half-page article, how current legislation and medical diagnostic practices are often reducing the last ten years of life to a living hell for some people.

- Currently many Australians who were brought up in Europe in the war do not have good bone density levels. This applies to people of Asian or African origin too here in Australia. People who do not exercise have a similar problem. I am 71 and I am one of these, exacerbated by carrying badly designed packs up mountains in my youth. I have spondylosis or spinal arthritis. Arthritis in all its 170 odd varieties is a destroyer of quality of life, and there is no cure or palliative treatment in its advanced stages yet. Bone pain, be it cancer or arthritis is the most excruciating thing one could experience. Non-stop kidney stone pain might be comparable. I have hip replacements, lumbar plates supporting my lower back and my thoracic (mid-back) and cervical (neck) spine are in pretty bad shape. I have marvellous quality of life, involving many wide-ranging activities, but exercising, sometimes in water, four times a week to achieve this.
- My godmother had spondylosis too. She emigrated here from Britain in her mid seventies and was in a hospital in Manly when she was 93. Spondylosis means the spinal discs disintegrate and become tangled up with the sciatic and other nerves. The crumbling spine is agony. One can bend down and not be able to straighten up. More surgical plates can be inserted (four months not driving or leaving home much) but this puts pressure on the vertebrae above the plate. My godmother was reduced to lying down permanently but with all her other faculties intact. Knowing I had been in the Voluntary Euthanasia Society for many years, finally in excruciating pain, knowing that the rest of her was good for another few years, she asked me to help her die. Of course I couldn't, **NOR COULD I REFER HER FOR HELP TO ANYONE**. This was in 1999. So she did what she had to do. With a huge effort she tried to get herself to the toilet in the night and literally broke her own back. I will probably have the same situation and both make me angry as I feel parliamentarians with no understanding of either of our medical cases, legislate to prevent us getting help. If my godmother had not been able to pay for her length of stay in hospital, her family would have had to nurse her 24 hours round the clock at home. And how many baby boomers are coming to retirement with bad backs in the coming years?
- I wish to record in the strongest possible terms my support for legalising voluntary euthanasia and ask you to accept this submission in support of Senator Brown's Bill to repeal the Act of 1997 to allow the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and Norfolk Island pass legislation to help people who are terminally ill.

I dedicate this submission to my courageous godmother.

Christine Shaw

I have illustrated literature with diagrams available explaining spondylosis and its problems as there are literally thousands of people with degenerating spines.