


Alastair William Keith and June Frances Henderson


22nd March 2008

The Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Dear Committee Secretary

We write to support Senator Bob Brown's Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Repeal Bill 2008).

The Euthanasia Laws Act 1997, which overturned the democratic rights of the electors of the NT, denied Australians the right to the most important decision of their life. This act reinforces the view that there are people in society who can turn, without compassion, a blind eye to suffering through illness or disability, severe pain or distress for which no remedy is available.

A consequence of this law is that people whose time has come die a lonely death, leaving behind a grieving family and friends who should have been able to say goodbye in a sad but caring and loving event.

There is a strong body of evidence that voluntary euthanasia (VE) is gathering a groundswell of public support:

- support for VE in the most recent Australian poll(Newspoll 2007) has increased to 80% since the Euthanasia Laws were passed;
- VE bills have been debated in Australian states and whilst unsuccessfully so, it is an indication that Australian thinking is changing since the Kevin Andrew's exercise;
- desperate people who fear the worst that politicians can inflict upon them are traveling to Switzerland to be able to have a dignified death;
- elderly people are travelling to Mexico to ensure that they have the means to ensure a peaceful end rather than being enforced into a feared alternative;
- whilst science is enabling people to live longer, the natural process of senescence means that the number of people whose physical and mental systems fail is increasing and for which palliative care cannot assist in any meaningful way to change that status;
- anyone who has made the effort to fully understand the rigour of the legislation enabling people to qualify for physician assistance , will recognize that the "slippery slope" argument is fanciful and baseless;

- voluntary euthanasia laws have been passed in Belgium, The Netherlands, Oregon (USA) Israel and Albania since the Euthanasia Laws were passed.

Whilst suicide is not a criminal offence, the law allows people to take their lives by some of the singularly desperate means:

Electrocution

Burns and fire

Jumping in front of trains and lying before a moving object

Jumping from natural or man made heights

Cutting and piercing instruments

Drowning

Firearms

Suffocation

Hanging

Carbon monoxide

Gas

Corrosive substances

Agricultural chemicals

Suffocation by plastic

The ABS statistics show that in the period 2000 to 2004, an average of 144.6 people commit suicide per year. Some terminally people are unable to take even that tragic and desperate choice because the law prevents them from seeking assistance.

Yours sincerely

Alastair & June Henderson

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