
From: Knights of the Southern Cross
Sent: Tuesday, 8 April 2008 10:37 AM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Euthanasia Inquiry Submission
Importance: High

Dear Secretary

Please accept the following Submission to the Inquiry into the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 from the Knights of the Southern Cross (NSW) Inc.

A signed copy on our Official letterhead has been sent by Express Post to your postal address in Canberra.

Yours sincerely,
Ray Barbero

Ray Barbero
State Secretary
Knights of the Southern Cross (NSW) Inc.
kscsydney@nareg.com.au
Phone: 02 9390 5341
Fax: 02 9261 8739

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir

**Submission to the Inquiry into the Rights of the Terminally Ill
(Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008**

Knights of the Southern Cross members are opposed to any legislation that allows euthanasia, and therefore opposes the repeal of the 1997 Act, on the following grounds:

1 Sanctity of Life Euthanasia weakens society's respect for the sanctity of life. The Bill, originally introduced by Senator Bob Brown, is now supported by Senator Lyn Allison who in 2004 stated to the press that "the right to die is a basic human right". On the contrary, the 'right to die' is not a basic human right—it is in direct opposition to the natural human inclination to perpetuate and preserve self. Governments should maintain the basic rights of the sick and elderly to quality compassionate care and respect. Former US President Thomas Jefferson said, "The care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government".

2 Doubts about free will Vulnerable people will be pressured to end their lives.

Irrespective of 'safeguards' built into euthanasia legislation, there will be abuse in its administration. This has been the common experience in the few countries with legal euthanasia. Legalisation can lead to uncaring or selfish relatives, or doctors, imposing death on unaware or unwilling persons. People who are sick, aged or depressed are at risk of consenting to be killed rather than seeking help. Psychological pressure could be applied because of the financial burden on their families.

3 Presumed mental competence Given that mental competence can be difficult to determine or even define, patients who are *not* mentally competent might be said to have 'agreed', mistakenly or coercively, to be killed. One wonders about the mental competence of the famous Belgian author, Hugo Claus, who had Alzheimer's disease when he asked for euthanasia. He died in March 2008, assisted by an Antwerp doctor—doctor-assisted suicide is legal in Belgium (1).

Selfish relatives could coerce doctors into ending the life of a person who has become mentally incompetent, so as to access inheritance. People who are merely clinically depressed might be diagnosed as, or consider themselves to be, terminally ill. Such persons need legal protection, not euthanasia. Patients who are abandoned by their families may feel euthanasia is the only solution, whereas, given time, they would prefer to live.

4 Problems for professionals Euthanasia compromises the professional roles of health care employees, especially doctors. Traditionally, in the ethical practice of medicine, doctors have taken the Hippocratic Oath, which disallows euthanasia. With very tight financial constraints in hospitals, euthanasia legalisation would provide personnel with an economic incentive to advise or pressure patients to give consent.

5 Deterrence in seeking medical help Legalising euthanasia would frighten some people from seeking professional medical treatment. When the Northern Territory's euthanasia legislation was in force, aborigines were frightened to seek medical advice, in serious cases, for fear of being 'euthanised'.

6 Palliative care is much improved At the times the euthanasia laws were enacted in the Netherlands, Oregon (USA), Belgium, and in Northern Territory (in the mid-1990s), specialist palliative care was underdeveloped. A 2007 Netherlands research study showed that the practice and delivery of palliative care had improved with the training of more specialists in that field, and that the number of cases of euthanasia had fallen (2).

The terminally ill have the right to skilled palliative care. The standard of palliative care has improved in Australia, but it still is not widely available (3). Therefore, Australian governments, rather than introduce euthanasia legislation, should concentrate on upgrading specialist palliative care and making it accessible to all the terminally ill.

Knights of the Southern Cross members maintain that euthanasia is morally unacceptable and against the national interest.

Yours sincerely

Manuel Diel
State Chairman
Knights of the Southern Cross (NSW) Inc.
PO Box A280
SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1235
8 April 2008

References:

- (1) Website <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthanasia> accessed 5-04-2008.
- (2) See Inquiry Submission No. 357 from the University of Notre Dame.
- (3) Ibid