

**Submission**

to

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

**Inquiry into**

**"The Rights of the Terminally Ill  
(Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008".**

**From**

**Salt Shakers**

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Salt Shakers is a Christian ethics group addressing matters of public policy from a Christian perspective. A monthly journal is produced, as well as an email news service and a website.

## Submission

Salt Shakers makes the following points in opposing the intent and content of the "**The Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008**" as presented to the Senate by Senator Bob Brown.

### A) Salt Shakers opposes Euthanasia

#### 1. Life is sacred

Euthanasia is a contentious issue and some are concerned about pain felt by dying people. However we maintain that life is sacred and that we do not have the right to shorten that life prematurely through euthanasia or deliberate death. As a Christian group we contend that the days of our life are numbered by God.

#### 2. Dignity in valuing life

True dignity is found in valuing the life of all people and not allowing euthanasia or so called 'dying with dignity'.

#### 3. Euthanized against their will

Where euthanasia has been legalised overseas (eg The Netherlands), it has resulted in people being euthanized against their will as documented by the Rummelink Inquiry and other reviews.

In 1990 "The Rummelink Commission uncovered 1,040 deaths (0.8 percent of all deaths) from involuntary euthanasia. The Dutch do not refer to this practice as euthanasia, but call it "termination of life without patient's explicit request." Fourteen percent of these patients were fully competent, and 72 percent had not given any indication that they wanted to be euthanized."

This was 0.8% of all euthanasia deaths.

Even after euthanasia was legalised in 2001, there were still a considerable number of cases of people being euthanised against their will – about 0.7% and this remained stable in 2001 when euthanasia was legalised.

Source: <http://www.libraryindex.com/pages/573/Euthanasia-Assisted-Suicide-EUTHANASIA-IN-NETHERLANDS.html>

The *Journal of Medical Ethics*, a British publication, released a report in February 1999. It found that 'In 20 percent of euthanasia cases, the patient did not make a request; for 17 percent of these patients, there were other available treatment options.'

#### 4. Euthanasia cases are often not reported in The Netherlands:

The *Journal of Medical Ethics* found in 1999 that "Almost two-thirds of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide cases went unreported."

#### 5. Legalising some forms of euthanasia inevitably leads to the amending of the legislation to allow more liberal laws – sometimes known as the 'slippery slope'.

In The Netherlands, the original legal decisions related to terminally ill patients who had expressed a wish to die. In 1994 however this was extended when the court found that a mentally ill person who was physically well could also be allowed euthanasia.

After legislating to allow euthanasia in 2001, in 2004 the Dutch government moved to allow the euthanasia of children under 12. In fact it was acknowledged that it was already happening in the Groningen hospital.

This extension to the law was considered as ‘**people "with no free will," including children, the severely mentally retarded and patients in irreversible comas**’.

see **Now They Want to Euthanize Children, Wesley J Smith**,  
At <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/616jszlg.asp>

**See Dutch ponder 'mercy killing' rules,**  
CNN, Thursday, December 2, 2004.  
At <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/HEALTH/12/01/netherlands.mercykill/>

**Death by Committee, Weekly Standard, Hugh Hewitt, 2/12/2004**  
At <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/983ynlcv.asp>

**The law in The Netherlands now allows teenagers and children aged 12-16 to request euthanasia.**

**For an overview of the law and what is allowed see**  
<http://www.internationaltaskforce.org/hollaw.htm>

**And articles relating to the law in The Netherlands:**  
<http://www.internationaltaskforce.org/holland.htm>

#### 6. **Palliative Care**

Palliative care needs to be developed further and properly resourced so that pain can be managed and people can indeed end their lives with dignity.

### **B) Salt Shakers opposes the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008"**

1. The federal government overturned the Northern Territory euthanasia legislation by a democratic vote.
2. Re-addressing this issue in this way is inappropriate. If the NT government wants to attempt to pass a law regarding euthanasia they could do so. It is not the role of the federal government.
3. The NT ROTI Bill is deeply flawed – Dr Brian Pollard has analysed the original ROTI Bill in the submission he made to this Committee.
4. The Senate Inquiry found – as a majority – that “Moreover, the majority held that the NT euthanasia law was seriously flawed, lacked adequate safeguards, had an "unacceptable impact" on the health of the Aboriginal community, would "fundamentally" alter the doctor/patient relationship, and would ultimately devalue the lives of patients. [Senate Report, "Advice to the Senate," pp. 115-129. See below for excerpts from the report.] Source: <http://www.internationaltaskforce.org/iaa8.htm>

5. Allowing such a flawed law to be re-introduced by this back-door method is unwarranted and ill-advised.

## **Conclusion:**

Salt Shakers opposes euthanasia and also opposes the **Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008"**.

We recommend that the Senate Committee not support this Bill.