

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

Dear Sir/Madam

**re Inquiry into the rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws repeal Bill)  
2008.**

I would like to comment on the proposed bill.

I should say at the outset that I do not support euthanasia and have said so when Mr Marshall Perron first introduced his bill into the NT in 1995.

At that time there was very little palliative care in the Northern Territory and supporters of euthanasia could have argued that therefore there was a need for euthanasia – not something I agreed with.

But regardless of whether there was a reasonable argument then, the fact is the NT and specifically Darwin now has a world class Palliative Care Unit developed in conjunction with local people and now supported by those people. The feedback I have heard from residents who have said goodbye to loved ones at this facility is it is a wonderfully designed and managed palliative care that allows people to die with dignity amongst family and supported by very professional staff.

I believe that with the increasing knowledge about palliative care there has been a lessening of support for the option of euthanasia. No doubt there is still support for euthanasia in our community but I feel that with more community education about palliative care more people are realising that you can have death with dignity without deliberately shortening life.

I am also concerned about where does euthanasia lead our society. If one says that you should have the right to end your life why should that only apply to just end of life experiences. What about people who are not terminally ill but are suffering physiological pain or depression or continuous pain or discomfort and want to end their lives? Say a farmer who has lost his farm because of the drought, the family has left him and he simply has nothing to live for, life is too painful to go on. Why not allow suicide to be legal? Certainly when you read and hear what Dr Nitscke says you would have to ask is euthanasia just the first step in the door of allowing people to take their lives whenever they wish?

But society doesn't support that. Instead it has various organisations that try and help people cope during these difficult times – Grow, Beyond Blue, DepressioNet.

So when people are dying, we don't kill them, we help them through this difficult time and allow them to die with dignity.

If there are parts of Australia that don't have adequate Palliative Care services then Senator Brown should be putting his energies into making sure these services are provided throughout Australia.

If euthanasia was the answer, then why is it, that so few places in the world have introduced it even though this debate has been around for a long time? Is it because that with the provision of good quality specialist palliative care legislators see there is a way around the need for euthanasia and avoiding treading the dangerous path and precedent of legally allowing the killing of a human being.

Perhaps Senator Brown by advocating euthanasia is actually demonstrating the fact that palliative services in Australia are inadequate and when those facilities are not available pressure is placed on politicians to take the less costly and populist path of promoting euthanasia as the solution.

We should care for the dying, we should treat them with dignity, and we should not regard them as burden or let them believe they are a burden on us. As Doctor Clarke from the University of Notre Dame said 'To correlate a *good death* with a deliberately shortened life seems the antithesis of caring and an expression of immense disrespect'.

If Mr Brown believes that euthanasia should be legal in Australia then he should argue for it to be legal all over Australia and pass Commonwealth laws to match. By asking the NT to carry the can if this bill – hopefully not - is passed would mean that the Territory (pop 205,000) would be the centre for those wanting to use euthanasia to end their lives whilst all the rest of Australia continued on scot-free of any care or responsibility. The NT would become the guinea pig in this debate as it was in 1995.

I do not support Mr Brown's Bill and I ask Federal Parliament to do the same. This is just a political stunt using the NT Parliament as the vehicle for that purpose. A debate on the dignity of human life when it is at its most vulnerable should be treated with seriousness and sensitivity. Let's have debate on the provision or otherwise of specialist palliative care services throughout Australia first, before we debate the dangerous path of euthanasia.

Yours sincerely

Gerry Wood MLA  
Independent Member for Nelson  
9/04/08