

**Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Inquiry into the Rights of the Terminally Ill
(Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. I write on behalf of the Social Issues Executive of the Anglican Church Sydney Diocese in opposition to the bill *Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008*.

We note that unlike many of the countless important decisions made by politicians each day, this Bill in particular poses profound personal and moral challenges to those given the task of determining whether it should be passed. As such, we acknowledge the difficulty, perhaps even burden this places on our parliamentarians and thank them in anticipation of the time and care that they will give considering the bill.

It is our hope that discussions about State and Territory autonomy will not eclipse the profound moral significance of this Bill. Any legislation that makes it possible for someone to terminate a life strikes at the heart of our humanity and the character of our society, and carries with it enormous responsibility. We note the unprecedented amount of time given to the debate of the 1997 Bill.

We wish only to make the following points:

- Much of the debate about euthanasia comes down to a disagreement on the definition of what it means to have a 'dignified' death, and we suggest that there will never be complete agreement on this. For those who are pro-euthanasia, having choice over the way one dies is critical to having dignity. We suggest that choice is important, but not an 'absolute' when it comes to ending a life.
Dignity involves getting appropriate medical care and pain relief, having financial burdens alleviated, being able to reflect on the joys and regrets of the past, the fears and challenges of the future. By prematurely ending a life, we believe this irreversible act may deny the terminally ill person and those around them with opportunities for reconciliation and spiritual healing.
- Christians believe that all life is precious, regardless of the person's guilt, their age, their ability to perform certain functions or their value to society. However it is not only a religious viewpoint. There is widespread acceptance of this view, which is evident in various international declarations and conventions. In the same way that many argue against the death penalty or abortion, we suggest that a person's life is no less precious when they are terminally ill, and their life is to be preserved and protected. Regardless of the altruistic motivation, we believe that to enable the taking of a life is to undermine the principle that all life is precious.

- We accept that tragically there may be situations of individuals who in spite of all the advances in palliative care and pain control may still experience unbearable pain. These individuals may be mentally competent to request assistance to voluntarily end their life. While we do not support euthanasia even in those circumstances, we also argue that legislating for these individuals opens up the potential for abuse of the many others who may be more vulnerable, and it would therefore be morally wrong.
- In a society that has an increasing emphasis on individualism we assert that the role of the law is to protect the vulnerable rather than the autonomy of individuals. This Bill will impact not only on the individuals who voluntarily choose to end their life but also on those who may be mentally incapable of choosing, on family members and friends, on the wider community and on those who are asked to assist with suicide.
- We express our concern that legalising euthanasia may in some circumstances become a substitute for treating depression and a convenient alternative to caring for the infirm, either deliberately or through human error.
- We note that Palliative Care Australia *“welcomes open and frank discussion within the community and within the health professions about all aspects of death and dying, but... that an informed discussion about euthanasia cannot be had until quality palliative care is available for all who require it”*. We urge members of the Federal Parliament to turn their energy and attention to shortcomings in the provision of healthcare and services for the 135,000 Australians who die each year. In particular, their financial burdens, their limited access to services (particularly for rural communities) and the inflexibility of workplaces to deal with the demands of those living with, or caring for someone with, a terminal illness - all need to be addressed. We believe that when these issues are addressed we can create a society where the possibility of dying with dignity is available for all Australians.

We urge those conducting this inquiry and the members of the Australian Federal Parliament to oppose the proposed bill and to protect the best interests of all Australians. In doing so, we believe the Parliament will help to shape a good and compassionate society, where the preciousness of all life is guaranteed.

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