

# *South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc. (SAVES)*

**Patrons:**

Emeritus Professor JA Richardson  
Emeritus Professor Graham Nerlich

**Internet:** <http://www.saves.asn.au>



**Please reply to:** SAVES President Frances Coombe 11 Boord Court, Dernancourt SA 5075

**Phone:** (08) 8336 8994

**E-mail:** [fcoombe@adam.com.au](mailto:fcoombe@adam.com.au)

**Mobile:** 0421 305 684

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

The Macquarie Dictionary defines democracy as “Government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system”.

In 1995 the agents of the people of the Northern Territory (the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly), who were elected under a free electoral system, passed a humane law (Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995) which, under carefully defined circumstances, allowed people with severe pain or suffering from a terminal illness to decide to end their lives, at a time of their choosing and in the presence of their loved ones, if they so wished.

The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly consists of twenty five members, all of whom are elected by the people of the Northern Territory. The House of Representatives of the Australian Government consists of one hundred and fifty members, of whom only two are elected by the people of the Northern Territory. The Senate of the Australian Government consists of seventy-six members; again only two are elected by the people of the Northern Territory. Thus there are only four members of Federal Parliament from the Northern Territory in a total number of two hundred and twenty six members. Clearly the will of the people of the Northern Territory is represented to a far greater extent in their Legislative Assembly than in the Federal Houses of Parliament.

Democracy demands that “...the supreme power is vested [in] ... their elected agents under a free electoral system”. It follows that the overturning of the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995 by the Federal Parliament, which has a minimal representation from the Northern Territory, was an anathema to the spirit of democracy and a contravention of the democratic rights of the people of the Northern Territory. The will of Territorians, which had been decided by their representative agents, who were elected under a free electoral system, was denied by federal groups in which they were minimally represented.

The Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 provides an opportunity for Federal Parliament to restore the democratic process to the people of the Northern Territory. The Bill is not about the issue of euthanasia and this should not be considered as its basis. The question to be asked is “Is there true democracy in Australia where the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system? If so, The Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 must be passed to reaffirm this.

**Frances Coombe**

**President – South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (SAVES)**