

Dying *with* Dignity

Tasmania (Inc)

AUGUST 2017

IN THIS ISSUE:

DwDTas AGM

TUESDAY 22 AUGUST AT 1.30 PM

NELL PASCOE ROOM, CRITERION CENTRE, HOBART

Meeting will be followed by a discussion to help planning for the State election and the next Bill. Then the usual cuppa and cake.

At the AGM, all positions will become vacant – please consider nominating. We need new people to become involved to keep DwDTas active and vital.

'FADE TO BLACK' DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS, FOLLOWED BY Q&A

FRIDAY 18 AUGUST, VILLAGE CINEMAS, COLLINS ST, HOBART

2 SESSIONS – ONE AT 4.00 PM AND ONE AT 6.30 PM

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL – 24 MAY

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the campaign for the Bill - contacting MPs, making the rally a great success, voicing your views in the media, sending us supportive messages and for donations. A very special thanks goes to some very generous donors, including some Committee members and others among our members and supporters, and to Darren and Jody at Resilience Marketing for their great efforts and support.

The support deserved a better result but there were positives. The community support for voluntary assisted dying and of the 8 MPs who spoke and voted for the Bill came through stronger than ever. The debate also showed the support in-principle among MPs was much greater than the vote showed. Yes, we are angry, disgusted and disappointed about much of the debate, but will continue with even greater determination for the next Bill - whenever that is.

ALSO: News from within Australia - Victoria, NSW, WA and Qld - and from NZ.

YOUR RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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AGM, DISCUSSION, MEMBERSHIP and COMMITTEE

AGM - Purpose and Agenda

In accordance with the Constitution, the purpose of the AGM is to consider particular general business. The Agenda for the 2017 AGM is as follows:

1. Apologies
2. Confirmation of minutes of the last AGM, 19 August 2016
3. Annual reports
4. Election of committee members and Office Bearers
5. Appointment of Auditor.

The venue is the same as the last few years, the Nell Pascoe Room, Criterion Centre. This is next to Mathers House, formerly called the 50 and Better Centre, between Criterion St and Bathurst St, Hobart. There is some parking, including disabled parking, off Bathurst St, just past the State Library. There is also good parking opposite in the Melville St car park.

DISCUSSION

There were significant advances that we can build on, despite the defeat of the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill* on 24 May. This included the increased active and strongly expressed support for the legislation that we saw in the rally, representations to MPs, in the media and social media.

For the first time, a Tasmanian Liberal MP voted for an assisted dying Bill. Analysis of the debate shows that the MPs who voted against it divided into two separate groups - those who will never vote for such a Bill and those who support it in principle (or could be convinced to do so). We include more details in the section of the newsletter about the Bill.

We would like to hear your reaction to the debate and to get ideas for future action for the next Bill.

We are also interested in the upcoming State election and the action we can take to make sure as many people as possible vote for candidates who support voluntary assisted dying legislation. Come along with your friends and join in the discussion.

MEMBERSHIP

Our financial year ended on 31 May. Your membership is due only if you have received a renewal form with your hard copy or email.

We always appreciate your renewal but it is particularly important this year to restore our depleted coffers following our spending on the campaign for the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill*.

Memberships are only \$20 per annum for individuals and \$30 per annum for family membership. You can renew for 1, 2 or 3 years. Donations are also welcome.

COMMITTEE

At the end of this newsletter is a nomination form for all positions. We would very much like to hear from you if you are at all interested in joining the Committee. Talk to any member of the Committee you know or contact the President on the DwDTas number.

It has been a very demanding few years for the committee. New voices, energy and passion are needed to keep DwDTas a vital and active organisation and to increase our effectiveness into the future.

If you live outside Hobart or otherwise can't get to meetings, don't let that stop you. We intend to cut back the face to face meetings to quarterly rather than monthly and do as much as possible by email. We would like to try 'meeting' by Skype. Please let us know your ideas on how to make it easier for people to be involved and contribute to the organisation.

'FADE TO BLACK' and Q&A

'Fade to Black' promises to be a very important documentary supporting voluntary assisted dying. The two screenings in Hobart on Friday 18 August (one at 4.00 and the other at 6.30) will each be followed by a Q&A session. Both will be at the Village Cinemas in Collins St.

Tickets cost \$25 and DwDTas will benefit from the screening by receiving a percentage of ticket sales – so come along and bring your friends. Please spread the news about the screenings. The promoters will be organising publicity and media coverage but word-of-mouth helps.

You can book online by going to: <https://au.demand.film/fade-to-black/>, select Tasmania (under the map) and click on the session you want to attend. If you aren't able to book online, Village Cinemas will accept cash / credit card walk-in bookings at the theatre on the day.

The film follows Peter Short through the final months of his life after he is diagnosed with terminal oesophageal cancer and told he has between three and nine months to live. (He obtained the illegal, lethal drug Nembutal from Dr Rodney Syme. He made it his final mission in life to ensure that all Australians have the same right to choose their own death.

The Q&A session will include his widow, Elizabeth Short, as well as the film-maker Jeremy Irvine. Cassy O'Connor will participate in the session after the 4 pm showing and Lara Giddings after the 6.30 one.

Interviews with Senator di Natale, Senator Lisa Singh, Rodney Syme and Andrew Denton are also included in the documentary made at the time of the Senate Committee inquiry into the Exposure Draft Medical Services (Dying with Dignity) Bill.

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

As you know, the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill* was voted down 16 – 8 at the Second Reading stage on 24 May. This is despite the principles and evidence based case for how necessary, compassionate, safe and valued that voluntary assisted dying legislation is overseas and will be in Tasmania.

This is despite the DwDTas rally at lunch time on 24 May in the Parliament Gardens which attracted about 450 people, and the many soundly based representations to MPs by supporters of the legislation.

The justifications for the votes against the Bill ranged from the disingenuous to the cynically ludicrous. We recommend you read what your democratically elected Parliamentary representatives said in the Hansard of the debate available on the Parliament House website. If you would like a copy but don't have online access, please contact us.

In the upcoming State election – to be held before March 2018 – we all need to remember who supported the Bill and who deserves your votes and who doesn't. We will add to this information with details of the views of new candidates. Help spread the word!

How they voted

The 8 who voted for it were:

- the passionate and committed co-sponsors, Lara Giddings (Labor - Franklin), and Cassy O'Connor (Greens – Denison)
- three other Labor MPs – Rebecca White (Lyons), Scott Bacon (Denison) and Michelle O'Byrne (Bass)
- two other Greens MPs – Andrea Dawkins (Bass) and Rosalie Woodruff (Franklin)
- Nic Street (Liberal - Franklin), who became the first and only Liberal MP in Tasmania and one of very few from any State to vote for a voluntary assisted dying Bill.

The 16 who voted against it were:

- three Labor MPs (all from the Right) – Madeleine Ogilvie (Denison), David Llewellyn (Lyons) and Shane Broad (Braddon – elected on a countback when Bryan Green resigned)
- 13 Liberal MPs – Will Hodgman (Franklin – Premier), Jeremy Rockliff (Braddon – Deputy Premier), Peter Gutwein (Bass – Treasurer); other Bass MPs – Michael Ferguson and Sarah Courtney, other Braddon MPs - Adam Brooks, Roger Jaensch and Joan Rylah, Matthew Groom (Denison), Jacque Petrusma (Franklin) and Lyons MPs – Rene Hidding, Guy Barnett and Mark Shelton.

The 7 Liberal MPs who voted for an amendment to send the Bill to another inquiry included the mover of the amendment, Roger Jaensch, the Premier, Will Hodgman; Peter Gutwein, Sarah Courtney, Adam Brooks, Mark Shelton and Nic Street. When the amendment was defeated, only Nic Street, voted for the Bill, as he had said he would.

The Speaker, Elise Archer (Liberal – Denison), did not vote. We do not know whether she would have voted against it as she did in 2013. We received no response to our letters to her in relation to the latest Bill.

Current ‘politics as usual’ that people are fed up with

What we saw in the debate inside and outside the Parliament on the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill* was the current ‘politics as usual’ that we’re all fed up with. There is hardly a week goes by without another survey or commentary about how the community feels about the behaviour of MPs – the belief that politicians don’t care about or represent the vast majority of their electors. Instead they act for vested minority interests, play petty Party politics on important issues and bow to Party factional powerbrokers.

There is also plenty of evidence about how the community views the behaviour of churches, church leaders and so-called Christian organisations when - as they did in this debate - they put dogma and fear-mongering propaganda before compassion, empathy and kindness and when they show no respect for the principle of freedom of conscience, religion or belief.

On the day before the debate, the AMA representatives presented to MPs their personal, largely religion-based views that were intolerant and disrespectful of the views of patients and the substantial proportion of their fellow AMA members who support voluntary assisted dying legislation.

So what did the debate tell us about the ‘consciences’ of the MPs?

What the so-called ‘conscience vote’ revealed was that the majority of the House of Assembly MPs have a very different view of what is right and wrong from the electors they are supposed to represent.

The vote demonstrated yet again that a majority of Tasmanian MPs did not care enough or respect the Tasmanian community, especially the people at the end of their lives with intolerable and unrelievable suffering and their doctors. MPs failed to provide any of us in that situation with a compassionate, respectful, voluntary and safe option to end that suffering through an assisted death.

Every MP knows that there are seriously ill people at the end of their lives with intolerable suffering that cannot be relieved despite the best efforts of palliative care and other medical staff. Despite this, 16 MPs voted against the Bill and abandoned these people (and their doctors) who want to end their suffering through assisted deaths as a last resort. The MPs failed to acknowledge the major harm being caused by the desperate and often

violent suicides described in the evidence of the Victorian Coroner, or other harms. They knew that every thorough recent review, including the Victorian inquiry into end of life choices, had found that all assisted dying legislation is working safely and effectively, with no evidence of abuses of people regarded as vulnerable. They had every opportunity to review the Bill thoroughly in the 6 months since it was first moved on 17 November 2016, and to talk to the proponents or to DwDTas but many still made inexcusably inaccurate claims about it.

The vote was a failure of the democratic process and MPs' responsibility to represent the community, not parrot the views of the tiny minority of largely conservative religious opponents. MPs who wanted to follow through acceptable values and principles and with respect for the evidence and reasonable arguments would have allowed a full debate in the Parliament.

A dominant recurring excuse for voting against the Bill was a cynical fake excuse and a fake choice. The fake excuse was 'not this Bill and/or not yet'.

The fake choice was that the MP had to choose between people at the end of their lives with intolerable and unrelievable suffering, and "the vulnerable". This is a fake choice because:

1. the strict requirements and multiple safeguards in the Bill have been shown to be effective everywhere else in preventing abuses and risks to people in so-called "vulnerable" groups
2. no evidence – not even a single example – has been provided by the fear-mongering opponents to justify the claim that people who are vulnerable are at risk
3. MPs used a crude, demeaning and discriminatory stereotype of everyone who is elderly or with a disability to justify their claims they are "vulnerable".

Seven Liberal MPs voted for an amendment to send the Bill to an inquiry, even those who supported the Bill in principle and showed they understood perfectly why the legislation is necessary. Another inquiry would be a completely unnecessary, time-consuming charade.

When that amendment was lost, only one, Nic Street (Liberal – Franklin) had the courage of his convictions and voted for the Bill to proceed to the full debate at the Committee stage.

OTHER AUSTRALIAN NEWS

VICTORIA: The Victorian Government has accepted all the recommendations of the Expert Panel set up to advise on what should be in their Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. The Bill will be moved in their Parliament before the end of 2017. MPs will still have an individual "conscience vote".

The recommendations are for a very restricted model. The Government has announced it will be "very narrow", "the most conservative in the world" and "the safest". The approach is most similar to but even more restricted than the US model. The Tasmanian Bill is closest to the Canadian model which all the evidence shows is safe but more effective in meeting the needs of more seriously ill people at the end of their lives with intolerable and unrelievable suffering.

The campaign against the Bill is already looking very aggressive and nasty by churches and church leaders, extreme Catholic groups like Right to Life, Catholic health care and the AMA.

NSW: A Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill has been released in NSW and is to be debated in their Parliament. We do not know when this will occur. It is also a very restricted model.

WA: The WA Parliament will debate a motion this month for an inquiry into end of life choices similar to the Victorian inquiry. The

Labor Government Minister David Templeman has been reported as saying the committee, which would be made up of eight parliamentarians, would deliver its report by 30 June 2018, allowing any recommended end-of-life legislation to be debated by the year's end.

Unlike Victoria, the Government is unlikely to sponsor any recommended Bill – but leave it as a Private Members Bill and with the usual “conscience vote”.

Qld: DwDQld is gradually gaining the public support of more MPs for voluntary assisted dying.

NEW ZEALAND

Two years and 21,000 “submissions” later, the NZ Parliamentary inquiry into voluntary assisted dying has produced an astonishingly inadequate report, with no recommendations. The Committee said they “encourage everyone with an interest in the subject to read the report in full, and to draw their own conclusions”.

Maryan Street was the MP who presented the petition that led to the inquiry and is now President of End of Life Choice, the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of NZ. She has described the failure to make any recommendations as “cowardly and a wasted opportunity”. Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE FOR 2016 - 2017

Margaret Sing (President)
Helen Brookfield (Treasurer)
Maureen Aiken
Trish Kershaw
Barbara Porter
Dr Helen Cutts (co-opted)

Bill Godfrey (Vice President)
Keith Anderson (Secretary)
Nica Cordover
Hilde Nilsson
Noel Woodrow
Mike Harris (co-opted)

Dying with Dignity Tasmania Inc - Proposal Form for Positions 2017 – 2018

Name of nominated member:

Signed: **Signature of nominee**

For the position of:
(President/Vice President/Secretary/Treasurer/General Committee)

Name of Proposer member:

Signed:

Name of Secunder member:

Signed:

Date:/...../ 2017

Please mail this form to: DwDTas, PO Box 1022, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7006, by 12 August 2017.