

Dying *with* Dignity

Tasmania (Inc)

MAY 2017

URGENT AND IMPORTANT NEWS

**THE TASMANIAN VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2016
WILL BE DEBATED IN PARLIAMENT ON 24 MAY**

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!

The new Tasmanian *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2016* Bill will be debated in the House of Assembly on 24 May 2017. There's been a lot going on behind the scenes and we thought the debate may be delayed till August. Yesterday, 2 May, the Leader of the Government in the House, Michael Ferguson, offered 24 May for the debate.

It's a tight timeframe but we agreed that it's better to get on with it. So we're now in full campaign mode, with plans and action underway for media, advertising, lobbying, etc.

BUT WE CAN'T GET THE BILL PASSED WITHOUT YOUR HELP.

We would greatly appreciate donations towards advertising, a planned radio campaign, some press ads and other media to get our message out there and to get people to the rally at lunchtime on 24 May. But we only have enough funds at present to run a brief campaign. Any additional donations will help to make it more effective.

We have the generous, passionate and skilled support of Resilience Marketing again, as in 2013. Thank you, Darren and Jody, and the other skilled people you've organised to assist us.

We are very fortunate to have such experienced and committed politicians as Lara Giddings and Cassy O'Connor sponsoring the Bill. They will be doing their utmost to get it passed. The DwDTas Committee will be working very hard lobbying MPs directly.

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YOUR RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. There will be a rally on 24 May, from 1 – 2pm, in the Parliamentary Gardens in front of Parliament House. **If you can be there, please come. Tell all your friends and family and do what you can to encourage others to be there. Check with us or keep an eye on our website and Facebook page.**
2. Other DwDTas action is being considered from early on 24 May to ensure a presence outside Parliament House and in the public gallery to watch the debate. If you could be part of that, let us know by email or phone. We don't yet know the time the debate will start though it will be after 11.00 am. We'll put the information on our website and Facebook page when we know. You can also ring us close to the day to get the information.
3. Help get media coverage in support of the Bill – write letters to the three papers, ring talkback, talk to journalists you know, etc.
4. Lobbying of Members of Parliament

Our focus at present is on the House of Assembly but we also need to lobby Legislative Councillors so they are prepared for the debate if and when the Bill is passed in the House of Assembly. You can get full contact details for MPs from the Parliament website or by ringing Parliament House. At this stage, we do not have a commitment to vote for the Bill from Labor MPs, Madeleine Ogilvie and David Llewellyn, and from most Liberal MPs.

Lobbying MPs is a tricky issue. Lots of 'form' emails are irritating and possibly do more harm than good. Here are some suggestions:

- If you email or write a letter to the MPs for your electorate, tell them in your own words why you support the Bill. If you are waiting to use the law because of your own medical condition and suffering, tell them (and let us know so we can add it to our lobbying material). If you have had the experience of a loved one who died badly because their wishes weren't respected, tell them.
- Handwritten letters are good, even if your writing is a bit shaky and no matter how brief.
- Phone the offices of MPs for your electorate and politely leave your message of support for the Bill with your name and address as a constituent.
- Getting meetings with MPs is difficult. We'll be trying to get DwDTas meetings with a number of key MPs. But if you know them, or see them at public events, please try to tell them that you support a voluntary assisted dying law and urge them to vote for the Bill.
- Raise the issue in conversations, pass the word that the debate is on, and try to get others to take action. Comment on social media, and 'like' our Facebook page and share information. (If you want particular information, try our website or contact us.)

WHAT WE'LL BE EMPHASISING

1. We have to make sure that no MPs can stand up in the debate and pretend that people aren't suffering intolerably and without relief and that no MP can engage in the cruel pretence that palliative care is some magical panacea. We're lucky to have the standard of palliative care and other medical care that we have, but it cannot provide the relief of pain and suffering and the timely, peaceful death that everyone wants. We strongly support the ongoing improvement in palliative care – it's not an either-or choice.
2. We want our politicians to act with the principles and values of empathy, kindness and respect for people at the end of their lives. We all want to make our own decisions to the full extent of our capacity, in accordance with our own beliefs and values, what's important to us and the reality of our situation.
3. The Tasmanian Bill is based on very thorough consideration and extensive research in Australia and overseas, and is closest to the model of assisted dying outlined by the Canadian Supreme Court and the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) in its policy, ["Principles-based Recommendations for a Canadian Approach to Assisted Dying"](#).
4. Assisted dying legislation is increasing – there are now 16 jurisdictions with some form of legal assisted dying, 7 since the last Tasmanian Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill in 2013.
5. The sky hasn't fallen in and there is no evidence of a 'slippery slope'. The Victorian inquiry into end of life choices that reported in June 2016, is just the latest of the recent, thorough reviews that have found consistently that existing legislation is working safely, providing a choice that people greatly value.

The Bill: We support the 2016 Tasmanian Bill because it will provide a last resort option for people at the end of their lives and with intolerable and unrelievable suffering, and for their doctors, to end that suffering through assisted deaths. Other aims of the Bill are important, including preventing desperate suicides, providing comfort and peace of mind to many that an option may be available if things get too bad and protecting doctors, families and others from the risk of prosecutions for acts of love and compassion.

To protect against the risk of abuses, there are requirements that people will have to be competent adults and make three self-initiated voluntary and informed requests.

Registered medical practitioners have significant roles and responsibilities to respond to the requests. At least two doctors, involved voluntarily and independent of each other, will have to confirm that all the requirements for eligibility have been met. As well as this doctor-safeguarded aspect, there is the additional safeguard of statutory monitoring, scrutiny and reporting to Parliament. The independent Registrar will have significant powers and responsibilities for information, education and guidelines, to monitor and review all deaths and take action as necessary, and for an annual report to Parliament.

We've commented before that those who oppose the legislation almost never mention the people themselves or the devastating effects of their serious, incurable and irreversible conditions and their terrible suffering. They fail to demonstrate the values they otherwise espouse or respect others' freedom to make decisions about their lives according to their own beliefs, values, priorities and circumstances. Opponents generally pretend that palliative care is the answer, or it would be if there was more of it. This implies they are happy that people will have to continue with their suffering until it becomes available!

OTHER AUSTRALIAN NEWS

For those with internet access you'll find regularly updated news in the section of our website, [Current situation – Voluntary assisted dying in Australia](#).

VICTORIA: The Victorian Government announced in December that it intended to introduce a Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill later in 2017. It established an Expert Panel to draw up recommended legislation. A discussion paper was released for public consultation closing on 10 April.

DwDTas submitted a response providing details of the Tasmanian *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2016* as one way that all the issues in the discussion paper had been resolved.

We don't yet know when the draft legislation will be released.

NSW: A cross-party NSW Parliamentary Working Group on Assisted Dying has been

working towards another assisted dying Bill. It is expected to be released soon.

WA: The election of the Labor Government with a supportive Premier, Mark McGowan, should be positive for legislation in WA. In March, WA Health Minister Roger Cook called for voluntary assisted dying legislation.

NATIONAL: The Restoring Territory Rights (Assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill 2015 reached the Second Reading stage in February and a number of speeches were made but no vote. Those in favour included Senators Leyonjhelm, Di Natale, Katy Gallagher, Doug Cameron, Derryn Hinch and Pauline Hanson.

Other news we'll cover next time: The report of the Inquiry into Palliative Care was tabled on 13 April. You can access it at <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/House/HAComDev-PC.htm>.

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)

Committee meetings: We hold our meetings in Kingston, in D Building, Old School Building in Hutchins St. While they are usually scheduled for the second Wednesday in the month at 2 pm, there are occasional changes depending on the availability of members. We would love to see you at meetings but check first by ringing on the DwDTas number.

Next meeting: 10 May
