

# DYING with DIGNITY

Tasmania (Inc)

our right to choose

November 2007

PO Box 1022 Sandy Bay 7006 Tasmania.

[www.dwdtas.org.au](http://www.dwdtas.org.au)

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## Welcome to our new President, Mike Harris.

Mike came to Australia in 2000. Mike and his wife, Di, arrived in an unconventional way, sailing their home built 13.5m cutter all the way from UK, starting the voyage some 20 years earlier and calling at many countries on the way.

With a background in chemistry, engineering and more recently computer science, Mike worked as a technical author and programmer during the travel years. His interests include pottery, amateur radio and bush regeneration work.

Mike has been a supporter of voluntary euthanasia for many years, but only actively involved for the past four. He is looking forward to helping Tasmania in the next phase forward and he welcomes input from members, especially via the new DwD website: [dwdtas.org.au](http://dwdtas.org.au)

## From the President.

### Our new Committee.

If you attended our last AGM you will be aware of the difficulties we had filling key committee positions for the coming year. We elected seven ordinary committee members but the crucial jobs of treasurer, secretary, vice-president and president remained vacant and those that had occupied these positions in the past had done so for many years and felt that fresh input was needed. Nonetheless, I am now pleased to say that at our first meeting in September, all key positions were filled with members providing a mix of new skills and continuity with the past.

However, the message of the AGM is clear; we need to see some new members taking an active part as I know that many of you have invaluable experience and views that would benefit DwDTas and that we could all learn

from. Could it be that a feeling of isolation and unfamiliarity of how DwDTas is working could be a contributor to member reticence? With this in mind we have planned a number of social and working events that will provide opportunities to meet fellow DwDTas members.

## A date for your diary - 23<sup>rd</sup> February

### The Waterworks Barbecue

Often DwDTas members live in the same village and maybe even the same street as other members but never know it. This is a chance for those living in reach of Hobart to put that to rights by coming to the barbecue we are holding in the **Waterworks Reserve (Waterworks Road, Hobart) on Saturday, 23 February at 12 noon.**

If you don't know this reserve, it is a very special spot, well worth a visit even if we were not having a barbecue. Next to a couple of reservoirs, this historic site is beautifully maintained and has splendid views.

There are several barbecue sites in the reserve but we'll be at **Site No 9**, which is at the far end of the reserve. Bring a plate to share and/or something to cook. It'll be a great day even if it rains as this site is covered, has plenty of space, water and is close to a parking area and toilets.

To give us an idea of numbers, a note to say you'll be coming would be appreciated.

### DwDTas Website – [www.dwdtas.org.au](http://www.dwdtas.org.au)

I am pleased to say that our web site is now up and running again. Do give it a try and let us know your views and any ideas you may have on how it should develop. You can do this via the "Contact us" form on the site while you could, of course, also use this site to tell us that you'll be coming to the barbecue on 23 Feb

Like all of the best web sites, this is a work in progress. You'll find this and past newsletters there along with links to our sister organisations in Australia and around the world. It's also a place for downloading documents, on topics such as Enduring Guardianships, membership forms, etc.

### **Communications**

What do our rural schools, Gunns, the CWAA and Al-Qaeda have in common? – they all make extensive use of email and the internet, and I wonder if there can be any thriving organization out there that does not. DwDTas is catching up on the action and will in future be making more effective use of email for group discussions, correspondence, distributing documents and news letter postings. Savings in postage alone are considerable so if you do have an email address, please help us by filling out the email details on [www.dwdtas.org.au](http://www.dwdtas.org.au)

If you hate computers and wouldn't have one at any price, I must say that I often feel the same way, particularly when fighting with some new logic-defying piece of software. So have no fear, we will of course not be abandoning those without this technology and continue to offer regular snail mail for newsletters, subscription renewals and important correspondence.

While on the subject of communications, here's a reminder of the impact of the "Suicide Related Materials Offences Act". This Act came into force in January 2006 and forbids the use of "Carrier services" (eg email, internet or telephone) to pass material that may be used to "counsel or incite committing or attempting to commit suicide". The law is widely considered to be an erosion of the basic freedom of speech, but penalties are enormous and it is hard to know exactly what types of discussions courts will interpret as "counselling or inciting a suicide".

To avoid falling foul of this law always use regular snail mail for any discussions that might fall into this category.

## **OVERSEAS NEWS**

### **UK Opposition to Euthanasia Dropped**

Long-standing opposition among doctors to euthanasia was effectively dropped when doctors voted at the BMA conference to change the association's policy, which means in practice they will neither campaign for, nor against any future change in the law.

British Weekly Telegraph 6.7.07

### **UK Living Wills Honoured**

It is legal in the UK for an incapacitated patient to be denied artificial nutrition and hydration (considered to be medical treatment in law) if doctors consider death to be in their best interest.

Living wills are to gain full legal status in October under the Government's controversial Mental Capacity Act, which critics say amounts to 'back door euthanasia'. Doctors who refuse to obey them will then leave themselves open to criminal prosecution now.

### **Switzerland. Swiss High Court Opens Possibility of Assisted Dying for Mentally Ill.**

A ruling by Switzerland's highest court has opened the possibility that people with serious mental illnesses could be helped by doctors to take their own lives. The ruling states, "It must be recognized that an incurable, permanent, serious mental disorder can cause similar suffering as a physical (disorder), making life appear unbearable to the patient in the long term...if the death wish is based on an autonomous decision which takes all circumstances into account, then a mentally ill person can be prescribed sodium-pentobarbital and there assisted in suicide." Further they stated, "A distinction has to be made between a death wish which is an expression of a curable, psychiatric disorder and which requires treatment, and (a death wish) which is based on a person of sound judgment's own well-considered and permanent decision, which must be respected..."

The case was brought by a 53-year old man with a serious bipolar affective disorder, who asked the tribunal to allow him to acquire a lethal dose of pentobarbital without a doctor's prescription.

### **World Right-to-Die Newsletter, Summer 2007 US. Praise and Damnation for Final Exit.**

Derek Humphry's classic, the "how-to" book, received both a pat on the back and a slap in the face.

In April, the editors and book critics of USA Today, selected Final Exit as one of the 25 most memorable books of the last quarter century.

The "how to" paperback has been a consistent best seller since 1991 and has been translated into 12 languages (though only Spanish and Italian are now in print).

In contrast, Google Adwords, the search engine giant's advertising unit, rejected Final Exit advertising, giving their reason that it concerned "violence". Two appeals to higher management failed.

### **World Right-to-die Newsletter, Summer 2007 French medical professionals admit helping patient die.**

A manifesto signed by 2134 French doctors and nurses entitled "We the carers are Aware...." Has been published in French newspapers. It states in part:

"Because without any doubt, the illness defied our therapies, because, in spite of the treatment administered, the physical suffering made the life of the patient unbearable, because the patient wanted it all to end, we, the carers, having in full consciousness helped patients to die with dignity."

World Right-to-die Newsletter, Summer 2007

**Guide for Life Support** The Law Commission has recommended forming a panel of medical experts to [approve](#) decisions [such as](#) whether a doctor may withdraw life support to a terminally ill patient. Sources said the move is aimed at saving doctors from the harassment that often follows such decisions.

This would provide safeguards for doctors against litigation and encourages patients and their relatives to approach high courts for a declaration on whether the decision to continue or withdraw life support is "lawful"

The Telegraph (India) 13.9.07

### **Colombia**

Colombia is the only country in Latin America where euthanasia is not outlawed, according to Associated Press. Euthanasia became permissible in Colombia in 1997 when the country's highest judicial body, the Constitutional Court, ruled that a person might choose to end his or her life and that doctors could not be prosecuted for helping them.

Saves South Africa: (Kind permission Dr Linley Lister, Final Exit-Zimbabwe. No 25.)

### **USA - Dog Euthanasia Drug stolen from Vet's clinic.**

A drug stolen from a veterinary clinic on Cape Cod could be deadly to humans.

The drug, which was identified as Euthasol, which is used to euthanize animals, was stolen during a break in. Several 100ml vials were stolen.

Barnstable, Mass. AAP 6.9.07

## **Election News**

The following letter in email form was sent to both major political parties earlier this month. Up until the time of publication neither party had replied. We can only conclude that it is sitting in their too hard baskets.

**Please may I know your feelings on legislation for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia.**

**Currently 80% of Australians polled (Newspoll, Feb.2007) say they would like this to happen.**

**This figure is consistent with figures from other developed countries.**

**Countries that now have euthanasia laws show little increase in their death rates, no cases of malpractice have been publicised to my knowledge, and the lives of those against voluntary euthanasia remain unchanged.**

**The big plus is for the sick and elderly who draw comfort from the knowledge that they may be the ones to decide.**

**Thank you.**

**Sheila Howe. 10 Victoria Mews, Lindisfarne 7015. ph 62430716.**

This same email letter sent to the federal Greens Party brought enthusiastic phone calls and the following response in a matter of hours. We ask you to draw your own conclusions.

***"The Australian Greens Leader, Bob Brown, is a strong advocate of the right to die with dignity.***

***In 1984 as a member of the Tasmanian Parliament, Bob introduced legislation for the right to die with dignity legislation.***

***In 1996 in his first speech in the Senate as an Australian Greens Senator for Tasmania Bob spoke on this issue.***

***September 2006, Bob moved a motion "That the Senate supports the right of Australians to die with dignity". Both Coalition and Labor voted it down.***

***In February this year, Bob introduced a private members' bill, The Australian Territories Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill 2007."***

## EXIT INTERNATIONAL – ANNUAL REPORT

EXIT International is active in all states and New Zealand. Dr Philip Nitschke's calendar is always full, so unfortunately he is not able to fulfil all requests.

Exit's research and development into the peaceful pill continues and the Peaceful Pill Handbook is currently available on line from amazon.com

It was reported that in the past twelve months approximately 50 members visited Mexico as part of an Exit tour programme to purchase their nembutal.

An Exit Sydney office will be opening shortly.

### Philip Nitschke's campaign in Menzies.

Philip and his team of helpers have been working hard for some weeks leading up to federal Election Day on 24 November. Excellent temporary office premises have been secured in a shopping centre in the Menzies election.

Philip says the reception from voters in Menzies has been encouraging with many people recognising him from past campaigns and welcoming him back, while others are so set upon seeing the end of Kevin Andrews that they welcome warmly a new candidate with this objective.

Early reports from this active campaign mention a general dissatisfaction with the "Howard" government, saying that they are out of touch with the electorate.

It was also said that there has also been considerable criticism of the Federal government's recent approval of the Gunns' pulp mill in Tasmania's Tamar Valley.

### The bitter end

Death is not the real enemy, it's ageing and the disabilities it brings that we should be fighting, says *Guy Brown*

This article from the *New Scientist*, kindly sent in by Jenny Atkinson, tells how our life expectancy has increased dramatically in the past 200 years, when people died young, and they died relatively rapidly, mainly from infections.

Now our life expectancy has more than doubled. Unfortunately, this increase in lifespan has not been matched by an extension of health. The years we gain are mostly spent with disability, disease and dementia.

Medicine has become very good at eliminating acute causes of death such as infections, but the downside of this success is that people live long enough to suffer from degenerative disease.

An unfortunate factor is that it is more profitable for pharmaceutical companies to develop drugs that keep patients alive but uncured, rather than curing the disease, which keeps the customer.

Yet we are doing absolutely nothing about it. Death, dying and dementia are nowhere on the political agenda. We need to stop turning a blind eye to the multiple miseries at the end of life and attack ageing and the diseases of ageing head-on. Research funding should be directed here rather than aimed simply at preventing death.

Last, but not least, we need a new attitude to death. Death is not the enemy; it is an integral part of life.

*New Scientist*, 13.10.07.

(If you would like a copy of this article in full, send a s.a.e.to S Howe,  
10 Victoria Mews Lindisfarne, Tas 7015)

*Do we have a Dutch speaking member who would be willing to read the Dutch 'Relevant' magazine for us, please?*

***We respect the wishes of those who wish to live for as long as possible.***

***We work for those who want the right to be allowed to die at a time of their choosing,***

***When they are hopelessly ill and may be in pain.***

***We live in a democracy.***

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