



HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.
Affiliated with the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS) and
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Re: RIGHTS OF THE TERMINALLY ILL (EUTHANASIA LAWS REPEAL) BILL 2008

SUBMISSION FROM THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC. (HSV)

The HSV is a secular organisation whose members foster an ethical, reasoned and responsible approach to life. It supports human rights, democratic processes, and a just and inclusive governance.

It seeks to alleviate suffering, to promote well-being and the circumstances where all individuals can attain their full potential. It engages in educational, counselling and charitable activities.

The views that follow have been formulated at specially convened group discussions to which all HSV members are invited. Further supportive information is obtained from print publications, the Internet, public lectures and from individuals with relevant expertise.

The Convenor of the HSV Submissions Committee is authorised to present these views.

We write in support of the Rights Of The Terminally Ill(Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 now before the Federal Parliament.

GENERAL REMARKS

1. Australian Humanists regarded the original Northern Territory's "Rights of the Terminally Ill Act" as a long overdue, compassionate and civilised approach to a problem created by modern biotechnology. Life can now be greatly prolonged, but without assured quality and we now die more slowly than ever before.
2. We were dismayed, for several reasons, when this Bill was overturned by the Commonwealth:
 - a) That the democratic rights of those living in the States can be denied to those in NT, ACT and Norfolk Island.
 - b) That the operative word VOLUNTARY was omitted from Kevin Andrews' Bill, "Euthanasia Laws Bill" 1996. Such omission is found occasionally in the press and is due to sloppy language. The Law and Mr Andrews cannot be so accused. This omission was therefore intentional and ,in our view, dishonest.
 - c) That this compassionate, civilised approach to the suffering of the terminally ill was being denied in Australia while other countries were adopting it.
3. We fully respect and support the rights of the many who choose any measures to prolong their life. The rights of those few who seek assistance in ending their life in terminal illness should be equally respected and granted.
4. At the core of this issue is the person's autonomy. A growing respect for autonomy and freedom of choice is the mark of a maturing society.

SPECIFIC POINTS

5. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that three Australians over the age of 75 take their own lives every week.
6. The vast majority - 80% by Newspan 2007 - persist in wanting voluntary euthanasia to be legalised. This attitude exists across religious, political, age group and social divides.
7. In other countries, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Oregon USA and Luxembourg , voluntary euthanasia is permitted under strict legal and medical supervision. There is no evidence of the predicted slippery slope.
8. A law that denies the relief of prolonged and severe suffering for the terminally ill humans but enforces it in case of other animals, is an incongruous, wrong law.
9. The Journal of Medical Ethics reports a recent study where 58% of doctors now support PAD (Physician Assisted Dying).

10. The practice occurs frequently, in a clandestine mode, as testified by doctors and nurses. It is essential that the process be open to scrutiny and performed by experienced and accountable medical practitioners.
11. Thus the current legislation is harmful for two other reasons: it puts the caring, compassionate physician in breach of the law, and it maintains the potential of abuse.

Yours sincerely,



Halina Strnad
convenor, submissions committee.
2.4.2008.