

MY LIFE MY CHOICE

A newsletter produced for the dominant purpose of educating and raising awareness of the need for voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland — No.16 September 2020

NQ MP puts VAD on the agenda



Inquiry chair hosts online Q&A session

Recently I was in Townsville with Everald Compton, campaign leader for Dying With Dignity Queensland, to take part in an online public information forum arranged by the Member for Thuringowa, Aaron Harper.

Aaron has represented the people of Thuringowa for the Labor Party since 2015 and chaired the cross-party Health Committee Inquiry that made recommendations for VAD laws for our state.

I deliberately choose to use the term “represented the people of Thuringowa” rather than say he has “held the seat” or use some other term or expression.

By arranging an online public forum on voluntary assisted dying he is meeting his responsibility to give his constituents a chance to gain basic facts and information about this vital issue and to allow them to question him and others who made up the online panel.

Those answering questions included Everald and me, as well as Andrew Denton from Go Gentle, Dr Sid Finnigan from Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice, Brisbane-based expert in



Aaron Harper MP fronts the media before his online VAD forum

end-of-life laws Professor Ben White, and well-known VAD advocates from Townsville, Marj Lawrence and Joan Musumeci.

The event was very successful and should be repeated by other MPs and candidates seeking to serve their communities in the next Queensland Parliament.

Aaron Harper set a benchmark for other MPs and candidates.

His work in chairing the end-of-life inquiry that recommended VAD laws should be recognised along with his ongoing and

passionate support for VAD law reform.

It is MPs who support VAD, like Aaron Harper, that we must keep in our parliament and that is why every voter who wants to see voluntary assisted dying laws in Queensland needs to find out before heading to a polling booth on 31 October where their own would-be MP stands on VAD.



David Muir
Chair
The Clem Jones Trust



Strong local interest

Media coverage of Aaron Harper's online public information forum on VAD reflected strong local interest in the issue. Townsville's print, radio, and television outlets all carried stories about the event and Mr Harper was congratulated for staging the forum to give locals a chance to hear the facts on VAD.



INSIDE:

Pro-VAD Vic MPs caught up in party infighting



Page 2



WA MP's speech you must read

Page 3

Former NZ deputy PM backs 'yes' case at referendum



Page 4



Greens candidate shows his colours

Page 6



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MPs and candidates face VAD quiz

Simple questions show who backs VAD and who doesn't

The My Life My Choice coalition is quizzing all MPs and candidates standing at the coming Queensland election to find out who supports voluntary assisted dying and who doesn't.

As Queensland approaches the 31 October state election, voters who want to see VAD laws in our state need to know which of their would-be MPs will support a VAD Bill in the 2020-2024 parliament.

Our questions will be seeking answers to two very simple questions.

The first asks candidates to state their in-principle views on VAD and does not require them to have seen the Bill being drafted by the Queensland Law Reform Commission.

The second question will help determine the strength of their commitment to reflecting the views of their constituents on the issue.

We look forward to bringing you the results before the election .

QUESTION 1: Do you, as a matter of principle support the right of Queenslanders to have the choice of seeking access to a system of voluntary assisted dying under appropriate protections and safeguards, if they have a terminal illness or neurological condition causing them intolerable suffering?

QUESTION 2: Would you, as an MP in the Queensland Parliament ensure your vote on a VAD Bill reflects the wishes of your constituents?

ASK YOUR OWN QUESTIONS: Sitting MPs and candidates are already taking to the streets to promote themselves. If you see any of them in your neighbourhood, ask them directly about their views on VAD.



Pro-VAD Vic MPs targeted in Liberal Party infighting

Alleged infighting for control of the Victorian branch of the Liberal Party has reportedly included efforts to punish some state parliamentarians who voted for voluntary assisted dying laws.

Media outlets including the Network Nine's [60 Minutes](#) and *The Age* and *The Australian* newspapers (pictured) have aired claims of "branch stacking" in the party.

The stories included claims that the so-called "religious right" had been attempting to rid the party of moderate MPs through the recruitment of "religious Right" branch members who would vote against them in party preselections.

ABC News [reported](#) that a secretly recorded exchange revealed plans by some Liberal powerbrokers to "get rid of" four MPs who

had voted for the state's VAD laws in 2017.

Allegations about the activities of the "religious Right" in the Victorian Liberal Party echo claims made in Queensland by the former LNP Member for Currumbin, Jann Stuckey.

As reported in the May 2020 edition of this newsletter, Ms Stuckey who quit politics this year [has publicly questioned](#) the behaviour of the "religious Right" in the LNP, saying those with conservative religious views "are very vocal and try to sway others to their beliefs and thinking".

"I have experienced this on more than one occasion, sometimes in a mild-mannered way and other times with considerable forcefulness," she said.

Secret Liberal strategy exposes religious coup

THE SEVEN MPs AND WHAT WAS SAID ABOUT THEM

 SIMON HANSAY Member for... Why he should go: Several... Why he should stay:...	 MARY WOODBRIDGE Member for... Why she should go:... Why she should stay:...	 CRAIG ONORAHIE Member for... Why he should go:... Why he should stay:...
 EDWARD O'DONOHUE Member for... Why he should go:... Why he should stay:...	 BERNIE FINN Member for... Why he should go:... Why he should stay:...	 GEORGE CROPPER Member for... Why he should go:... Why he should stay:...
 WENDY LOVELL Member for... Why she should go:... Why she should stay:...	The document also... It also recommends... The proposed new... Ms Stuckey...	

"Every group has a right to lobby those who have the power to legislate decisions and policy."



Jann Stuckey

"However, what I have seen in recent years could be described as intimidating behaviour towards elected representatives, coupled with extensive advertising and campaigning," Ms Stuckey said.

Anyone standing for election must read this speech

As part of the debate that saw the West Australian Parliament pass voluntary assisted dying laws last year, a senior member of the opposition Liberal Party spoke of the reasons he was backing the government's Bill.

Bill Marmion, deputy leader of the opposition and Member for the Perth-based seat of Nedlands said the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2019* was "the most confronting and difficult piece of legislation" he had to consider in his then 11 years as an MP.

He said the Bill was a "landmark piece of legislation" challenging a range of philosophical notions "including ethical, political, let alone cultural and religious".

Mr Marmion recalled his own 93-year-old father's relatively peaceful death just a month prior to the debate. He also reflected on the deaths of friends or relatives and work colleagues.

"I have been very lucky to have been around death only in circumstances in which passing has



Jos Hall
President
Dying With Dignity
Queensland

www.dwdq.org.au

not been painful," he noted.

Mr Marmion canvassed arguments for and against VAD and admitted he was concerned "about the path this Bill takes our society" which was why WA MPs needed "to give the matter and the wording of the Bill our utmost and careful consideration".

He said he previously suspected

THREE KEY QUESTIONS:

Q1: Do you know what voluntary assisted dying is?

Q2: Do you think VAD should be legalised and available to a patient who desires a painless termination and where a doctor has confirmed they have only six to 12 months to live?

Q3: Would you like to see your local MP support or oppose VAD legislation for WA?



Bill Marmion MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Member for Nedlands — WA Parliament 3 September 2019

"It is clear that the people of the Nedlands electorate overwhelmingly support this Bill. It is also clear that they expect me to represent their wishes in this House."

about 70% of people in his Nedlands seat supported VAD but wanted hard data so he commissioned research based on three questions (see box).

The results showed:

- 97.6% of respondents knew what VAD was;
- 85.5% thought VAD should be legalised for the terminally ill; and
- 82.1% wanted him to vote "yes" on the VAD Bill.

Mr Marmion said the results showed his constituents wanted VAD laws, they wanted him to support them, and he needed to ensure the new law included controls and safeguards around the operation of new laws.

He acknowledged the need for improvements to WA's system of palliative care but also said

although it could reduce pain associated with death in the majority of instances, there were times when that was not the case.

"This Bill is about providing those people who have a terminal disease or illness the choice to decide whether they wish to access voluntary assisted dying," he concluded.

"It is clear that the people of the Nedlands electorate overwhelmingly support this Bill.

"It is also clear that they expect me to represent their wishes in this House," Mr Marmion said.

[READ THE HANSARD TEXT OF THE DEBATE ON THE WA PARLIAMENT'S WEBSITE](#)

Supporters answer NQ church leader

The Catholic Bishop of Townsville, the Most Reverend Timothy Harris, entered the VAD debate again recently with a letter to the editor in the *Townsville Bulletin* claiming VAD laws were not needed.

He argued that a VAD system would "condition" people to accept it as a way to end their lives.

He also made the discredited claim that better palliative care is the answer — even though it has been shown that palliative care does not address the suffering of all terminally ill people or those with neurodegenerative conditions.

These and other points were made in several pro-VAD readers including letters by well-known local DWDQ campaigner Marj Lawrence on 1 September, a 28 August letter by Dr Malcolm Parker from Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice — part of the My Life My Choice coalition.

The published letters show the value of answering opponents of VAD, especially those who use spurious arguments.

Unfortunately many church leaders do not want to give Queenslanders the choice of accessing a regulated voluntary assisted dying scheme.

The arguments and objections they raise have invariably been answered by successive lengthy, detailed, open, and public parliamentary inquiries such as those in Victoria, Western Australia, and now Queensland that have all recommended VAD laws.

The only argument most church leaders are left with is this: because we don't want VAD, you can't have a better choice at the end of life.

The ongoing need to expose and rebut such arguments is now more important than ever.

JOS HALL

VAD findings worth read



POLL SHOWS CHURCHGOERS WANT VAD
See page 5

Townsville Bulletin
letters 1 September (top) and 28 August (bottom)

Tasmanian family backs VAD Bill

The family of a Hobart woman who took her own life in the absence of voluntary assisted dying is calling for law reform.

Their plea comes as Tasmanian MP Mike Gaffney has tabled his Private Member's Bill in a bid to enact voluntary assisted dying in the state.

The 64-year-old woman identified in media reports only as Trish at her family's request was diagnosed in 2019 with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

The rare but fatal disorder progressively shuts down a patient's physical capacities including their ability to see, swallow, and breathe.

Trish, an active supporter of Dying With Dignity Tasmania, ended her own life early this year.

Her husband Graeme and daughter Helen were in the family home when Trish took her life, but were not in her presence and to avoid possible prosecution both deemed it necessary to take steps to record the fact they had not assisted her.

Graeme [told ABC News](#) it would have made a difference if his wife had been able to choose voluntary assisted dying.

"Just having had that legal framework and the support would have completely changed things," he said.



Helen, Graeme, and Trish
From ABC News

Helen said her mother did not want anyone implicated in her death because of the risk they might face prosecution.

"She had to do it while she still had her decision-making capabilities, because she had to do it alone," she said.

She said the experience of her mother's death was extremely traumatic.

But she and her father hoped their story would encourage Tasmanian MPs to support Mike Gaffney's VAD Bill.



Mike Gaffney

DEBATE SET TO START

Mike Gaffney's [End-of-Life Choices \(Voluntary Assisted Dying\) Bill 2020](#) was tabled in Tasmania's Legislative Council on Thursday 27 August 20.

Its Second Reading debate is due on 15 September.

You can watch debate via the parliament's [livestreaming webpage](#).

TASSIE SENATOR SUPPORTS MOVE FOR NEW LAW

Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie says she wants to see the Gaffney VAD Bill passed.

Senator Lambie (*pictured*) entered the VAD debate by rejecting faith-based arguments against voluntary assisted dying.

"I respect people of faith - I am one myself," she [was quoted](#) as saying.

"Religious people worry that these laws could make older people feel like they are a burden."



"You cannot honour the preciousness of a person by compelling them to die on your terms instead of theirs."

Senator Lambie said evidence from Victoria and Western Australia showed there wasn't a rush of people to make use of voluntary assisted dying laws once they were enacted.

"Most people still want to hang on to life for as long as they can," she said.

Senator Lambie said Christianity required its followers to honour the dignity of life.

"To be consistent, that has to mean honouring the dignity of a life at its end," she said.

"You cannot honour the preciousness of a person by compelling them to die on your terms instead of theirs."

Ex-pollie says it's not about 'being a burden'

A former New Zealand deputy prime minister, Sir Michael Cullen, has urged a "yes" vote for the countries proposed VAD Act at next month's national referendum.

Sir Michael, a former Labour Party finance minister, has been diagnosed with terminal lung and liver cancer.

He was [reported](#) as saying that despite "excellent" palliative care in New Zealand, he was concerned about dignity and control in his final days and wanted the choice to be able to decide when it was right for his life to end.

"Our good people in the hospice movement provide excellent end-of-life care for many," he said.

"We are told our pain can be controlled to a tolerable level.

"This will suit many of us. But for many others, myself included, there is an overriding issue of control and dignity."

Sir Michael said he had read NZ's [End of Life Choice Act](#) that would be put to voters at the coming referendum and was confident the law was sound.



Sir Michael Cullen

"I have carefully read the *End of Life Choice Act*. It provides safeguards against pressure coming on the dying person from others," he said.

"Its scope is limited. It does not force any medical professional against their conscience. It respects the rights of those who find assisted euthanasia morally abhorrent.

"But it offers to people like me the chance of finishing the life I have enjoyed so much in a way consistent with my moral beliefs and my sense of the dignity of human life."

Sir Michael said his support for VAD and the proposed NZ law was not about what opponents

dismissed as "being a burden".

"I do not want my only choice being to die in a near-comatose state on morphine, which has been administered knowing it will shorten my life anyway.

"I do not want to lose control of my bodily functions so that my dignity has disappeared with the ebbing of my life.

"When I reach those last stages, if that is the prospect, I want the choice to be able to decide when the time is right to complete the circle of life."

NZ postpones vote on VAD Act

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the New Zealand Government to postpone the election previously scheduled for September at which voters were to be asked to approve or reject proposed VAD laws. The NZ Parliament passed a VAD law subject to approval by voters at a referendum. The vote will now be held at elections on 17 October.

Polling shows church leaders out of touch

The coming state election campaign will see an increase in anti-VAD activity in a bid by opponents to frighten MPs and candidates and erode the 70-80% community support for new laws.

We can expect a lot of scare tactics and the usual misleading claims from church leaders who claim to speak on behalf of their congregation but clearly do not.

It stands to reason that with support for VAD at 70-80% many people of faith are also VAD supporters.

Market research conducted in February but only released recently shows this to be the case. It shows that church leaders and church hierarchies using anti-VAD arguments based on dogma are well out of step with their own congregations.

Earlier this year the Clem Jones Group commissioned market research by the YouGov polling firm that proves the point.

It shows that even among respondents identifying as Catholics support for VAD is 68% overall with 60% support from those further identifying as practising Catholics and 73% among non-practising Catholics.

The poll results show similar high levels of support among other faiths, with 79% of Anglicans backing VAD and 83% support among those identifying as Uniting Church or Presbyterian.

It's quite clear that those speaking from the pulpit against VAD are not reflecting the views of those sitting in the pews in front of them.

DAVID MUIR

QUESTION: Voluntary assisted dying laws allow a person in the late stages of advanced disease to take medication prescribed by a doctor that will bring about their death at a time they choose. Currently the laws in Queensland do not permit this. Do you support or oppose the law being changed in Queensland to allow voluntary assisted dying?

RELIGION	SUPPORT VAD	OPPOSE VAD	DON'T KNOW
No religion	85	5	10
Catholic	68	16	16
Anglican	79	11	11
Uniting Church /Presbyterian	83	6	11
Other Christian	57	31	13
Other religion	72	7	21

PRACTISING OR NON-PRACTISING	SUPPORT VAD	OPPOSE VAD	DON'T KNOW
Practising Catholic	60	24	16
Non-practising Catholic	73	11	16
Practising non-Catholic Christian	54	33	13
Non-practising non-Catholic Christian	83	6	11

Polling of 1,020 Queenslanders conducted for the Clem Jones Group by YouGov from 31 January to 5 February 2020. The survey was representative of the Queensland voter population with a combination of quotas and weighting to ensure the sample matches ABS statistics. Some figures rounded in tables.

Victoria releases latest oversight report

The latest report by the government body overseeing the working of Victoria's voluntary assisted dying laws shows 124 people chose to end their lives under the system in its first year.

Victoria's *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act* took effect from 19 June last year. Its operation is overseen by the [Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board](#).

The [board's latest report](#) showed that in the year since the start of the new law:

- 341 applicants were deemed eligible for VAD at the first assessment stage,
- 297 applicants eligible at the second assessment stage,
- 231 VAD permits issued,
- 124 confirmed deaths.

As expected, a number of approved applicants chose not to proceed with the VAD process or died before the process was completed.

The report also showed that

applicants for VAD were aged between 32 and 100 with an average age of 71.

Of all those issued with a VAD permit and who subsequently died, 78% had a malignancy diagnosis and 22% had a non-malignant diagnosis including a neurodegenerative disease.

The chair of the Review Board and retired judge, Betty King, said it was clear from applicant statements that VAD was about "their personal choice, having control, and maintaining dignity in their death".

"However, a number of people expressed concern about a lack of support by doctors or health services opposed to VAD," she said. "We remind doctors there is a way to decline support, without causing additional distress to the applicant and their family."

The report identified other areas for improvement including in the processing of permit applications.

Some extracts from the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board's report.....

Many people – including some family members who were initially opposed to voluntary assisted dying – expressed gratitude that they were able to say goodbye to their loved ones. *"It was a beautiful, peaceful death. Was absolutely a pleasant and calm process which gave me so much relief to see her go so serenely."* – applicant's contact person

Loss of autonomy was frequently cited by applicants as a reason for requesting voluntary assisted dying.

"I wish to die in my own home and wish to have some control over my death. I do not wish to live as a vegetable in my own body. I have a condition for which there is no cure" – applicant

Other reasons for accessing VAD which were commonly reported included being less able to engage in activities that make life enjoyable, losing control of body functions, and loss of dignity.

"My reason is my brain tumours and I know I will become incapacitated with my motor skills and seizures. I would rather a natural death but it does not seem likely" – applicant

No deaths were considered reportable to the coroner.

"A beautiful passing; there were candles and music, he told a joke before taking the medication and followed the medication with a drink of port. It was the way he wanted to go" – contact person

MPs and candidates hold the key

Voters will back those who will back VAD laws



Recently I took part in a very useful and informative public forum on VAD arranged by Aaron Harper, the state MP representing the North Queensland electorate of Thuringowa who chaired the Health Committee Inquiry that recommended VAD laws for our state.

David Muir of the Clem Jones Group has already mentioned the forum on the first page of this newsletter.

Leaving aside Mr Harper's track record as the chair of the historic inquiry that put VAD laws on the legislative table, the forum was a very sensible and worthwhile initiative by a local MP.

I believe it would be beneficial to our whole community if more MPs and candidates seeking election to our State Parliament on 31 October took an interest in the issue of voluntary assisted dying.

Reliable polls consistently showing four out of five Queenslanders are in favour of laws to allow rational terminally ill people with unremediable suffering to voluntarily choose the timing and circumstances of their own end of life.

It is vital that politicians and the wider community understand that even with the most expert palliative care, the Australian Palliative Care Outcome Collaboration figures show that severe symptoms of

suffering persist and are unable to be relieved in about 15% of people in the period leading up to death.

Inability to control all suffering at end of life is recognised by a majority of doctors with 2016 polling by the leading medical journal *Australian Doctor* 2016 revealing two out of three supported VAD law reform.

In-depth parliamentary inquiries including those in Victoria and West Australia as well as the cross-party inquiry here in Queensland chaired by Mr Harper — have unequivocally shown that a significant number of people have non-remediable end-of-life suffering leading to extremely poor quality of death and, in the absence of a legal alternative, terminally ill people are taking distressing and lonely actions to end their own suffering.

Copious evidence now exists to clearly demonstrate that safeguards in VAD laws



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work and that the so called "slippery slope" arguments by VAD opponents have no basis.

Those seeking to represent their fellow Queenslanders in our next State Parliament should know that they will secure voter support if they back VAD laws.

Voters in turn need to satisfy themselves that the people they choose to represent them truly reflect their views on this important issue.



Dr Sid Finnigan MBBS, FRANZCO
Queensland Convenor
[Doctors For Assisted Dying Choice](#)

Candidate says where he stands

The Greens' candidate in the Gold Coast seat of Theodore has declared his full backing for VAD laws in Queensland.

John Woodlock said he had been a member of Dying With Dignity Queensland for several years and one reason he had joined the Greens was its policy supporting VAD.



John Woodlock

"I have read accounts of people dying who suffered terribly because this legislation was not in place and I would not want anyone to have to experience a death of fear, anguish and pain unnecessarily where palliative care can no longer help."

Check out who's who in your electorate



Anyone wanting to quiz candidates standing in their electorate about their stand on VAD but don't know which seat they live in can check their address on the [Electoral Commission of Queensland website](#).

To find the contact details of your sitting local MP, check the [Queensland Parliament's website](#).

You can find candidates for the parties standing in

your seat by visiting their websites:

- [LNP](#)
- [Labor Party](#)
- [The Greens](#)
- [One Nation](#)
- [Katter's Australian Party](#)
- [NQ First](#)

In addition a number of independent candidates

have declared their plans to seek office.

They include [John Connolly](#) in the seat of Maroochydore, [Claire Richardson](#) in Oodgeroo in the Redlands district, and [Margaret Keech](#) in Macalister.

VAD supporter and the Independent MP for Noosa, [Sandy Bolton](#), is also seeking re-election.



[Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice](#)

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The *My Life My Choice* monthly newsletter is produced by the Clem Jones Group, Dying With Dignity Queensland, and Doctors For Assisted Dying Choice (Qld) for the dominant purpose of educating and raising awareness of voluntary assisted dying.