

MY LIFE MY CHOICE

A newsletter produced for the purpose of educating and raising awareness of the need for voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland — No.29 September 2021

YOU DID IT!

Long campaign pays off

The solid “yes” vote in the Queensland Parliament for the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021* is a result of the efforts of thousands of people over many years – in fact, over many decades.

Dying With Dignity Queensland is just one of many groups that have fought long and hard to secure the result we saw recently in our parliament.

We have always reflected the overwhelming community support for VAD law reform but our campaign stepped up in the past three years and involved outreach efforts such as public forums, street stalls, road trips to regional centres, media interviews, and public events culminating in the Vigil for VAD on the eve of debate starting in the parliament.

Most important were our visits to meet local MPs to present our arguments in favour of a VAD law.



Jos Hall
President
Dying With Dignity
Queensland

I want to thank the Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and her government for initiating the law reform process that ended with the passage of our new VAD law.

Sincere thanks also go to all DWDQ members and supporters for all they have done to help achieve the passage of the VAD Bill. I also thank all of the many other groups and individuals who supported us and our campaign.

There are far too many to name individually, but we will always be grateful for your efforts.

I also want to thank all those MPs who voted in support of the Bill. They have truly made a huge difference for the better for so many Queenslanders.

I also thank MPs who did not vote for VAD for the respectful

THE VOTE:



HOW DID YOUR MP VOTE? – SEE PAGE 3



History made

VAD law pioneer, former NT chief minister Marshall Perron, seen here with Deputy Premier Steven Miles was on hand to see the Bill passed.

See page 8



Vigil for VAD part of a long campaign

manner in which they treated us when we met with them.

It has been a tough campaign, but throughout it all we were motivated by one aim – to help deliver a law to give the terminally ill a better choice at the end of life under a VAD law.

That has been achieved, but our work must continue. We must ensure the new law is implemented well, and we need to be on guard for any attempts to repeal it. We also must be prepared to argue for any refinements we think are needed when it is reviewed in three years.

So while we celebrate this historic win, we should all recommit ourselves to our cause and continue to work for those who need our support.

THREE VITAL DAYS

Tuesday 14 September:

Final debate begins with Deputy Premier Steven Miles as the first of 46 MPs to speak on Tuesday.

LNP leader David Crisafulli says he won't back the Bill.

LNP Deputy Leader David Janetzki tables 54 proposed amendments to the Bill.

A motion by the Katter's Australian Party to defer the Bill until extra palliative care funds are provided is defeated.

Wednesday 15 September:

A further 42 MPs speak on the Bill

Thursday 16 September:

Proposed amendments rejected

Bill passed – 61/30

Listening was crucial

MPs reached out to constituents

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

The success of the Bill to introduce voluntary assisted dying in Queensland is the result, in large part, of MPs listening to their constituents.

Throughout the campaign run by the My Life My Choice coalition partners advocating for the VAD Bill we stressed upon MPs the necessity for them to discuss the issue with their constituents.

We were confident that MPs who were willing to listen to the people in their electorates and to weigh up the facts and evidence would support VAD.

That proved in large measure to be the case.

The MLMC coalition encouraged MPs to host public forums on voluntary assisted dying and the VAD Bill when it was released, which many did.

Without exception they all found it to be an extremely valuable and informative exercise.

MLMC representatives were still speaking at MP forums right up until the week before parliament sat to consider the Bill.

The last forum, organised by the Member for Macalister, Melissa McMahon, was well attended and the audience was, as usual, overwhelmingly in favour of VAD but also wanted to know more about the details of the Bill.

I thank all MPs who used this process. I am sure it helped both them and their constituents.

I must admit that I was disappointed that



Melissa McMahon speaks at her VAD forum

Opposition Leader David Crisafulli could not support the VAD Bill and instead relied on tired and discredited arguments to justify his position. His central concern about the need for more resources for palliative care is shared by VAD advocates.

But many other MPs who voted for the Bill such as 10 LNP MPs recognised the facts and the evidence – that even the best palliative care does not alleviate all end-of-life suffering which is why we need VAD.

But the willingness of some MPs to be captured by groundless but emotive arguments should not overshadow what was a solid vote for VAD.

I thank every Queenslanders who shared our goal of seeing a VAD law in our state and who worked hard to achieve it.



David Muir AM
Chair
The Clem Jones Trust

The Bill is the result of years of consultation, research and analysis by the Health and Environment Committee, the former Health Committee and the Queensland Law Reform Commission.

The wisdom of other Australian jurisdictions has been harnessed and a scheme developed that reflects Queensland's unique circumstances, protects the vulnerable from coercion and exploitation and allows eligible people access to an additional end-of-life option.



It is a good Bill that honours choice, autonomy and compassion in end-of-life care.

It cannot give people who are dying back their lives. Sadly, we do not have that power, but we can give them some control over the timing and circumstances in which they die: to be surrounded by family and loved ones in a peaceful, private space — their own home if that is what they choose — hands held, farewells said, tears and stories shared — the kind of tearful laughs and memories that make for the most powerful funerals.

Steven Miles
Deputy Premier
Labor Member for Murrumba

Six years ago on Sunday my father passed away from cancer. He was in pain. The nurses were very great in what they did to assist him. I would have done anything to stop the pain he was in, but I could not. Ultimately, I believe in the right of people to make their own choices in life and now, I guess, in death. I checked with my electorate and they agree with me.

Michael Hart
LNP Member for Burleigh

Committee chair focusses on those who will benefit most

Member for Thuringowa, Aaron Harper, has chaired the cross-party Health Committee in both the current and previous parliaments which inquired into voluntary assisted dying, recommended a VAD Bill, and recommended it be passed without amendments. In his contribution to the debate Mr Harper outlined the benefits the Bill will deliver to terminally ill Queenslanders.

By passing this Bill, we will finally give those suffering a terminal illness in Queensland the choice to go out on their own terms with dignity, to end the misery and the awful, intolerable, needless suffering.

I hope that by passing this Bill we give comfort to those who are diagnosed with a terminal illness and their families that they have the right and the choice to die with dignity.

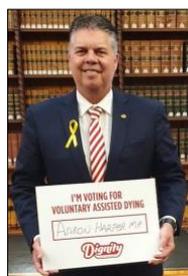
In the last three years our current health committee has had the carriage of the bill

and it has been a challenge emotionally.

Some have said it must have been a heavy burden listening to it, but it is nothing like the burden of those who are facing death through a terminal diagnosis.

The one thing I can reflect on is that everyone we spoke to could relate. They knew of someone who had suffered at end of life.

I have seen many people at end of life in my own career, not just patients or work



colleagues but family.

We are elected to listen to the people who voted for us. Members have a conscience vote and should listen to their electorates.

I know we will have our personal views and I respect that, but let us also think of the people who we are representing in this state on this day.

Let us be on the right side of history. Let us provide people a compassionate, dignified death, end the needless suffering and just show real compassion.

I want to end my contribution by saying that this should be above politics and it should certainly be above religion.

This is about people. Let us give people the choice. Let us let them make the decision on voluntary assisted dying.

CHECK HOW YOUR MP VOTED ON VAD



61

30

YES

- Mark Bailey – Miller **Labor**
- Michael Berkman – Maiwar **Greens**
- Sandy Bolton – Noosa **Independent**
- Mark Boothman – Theodore **LNP**
- Nikki Boyd – Pine Rivers **Labor**
- Don Brown – Capalaba **Labor**
- Jonty Bush – Cooper **Labor**
- Glenn Butcher – Gladstone **Labor**
- Michael Crandon – Coomera **LNP**
- Craig Crawford – Barron River **Labor**
- Yvette D'Ath – Redcliffe **Labor**
- Mick de Brenni – Springwood **Labor**
- Cameron Dick – Woodridge **Labor**
- Leeanne Enoch – Algeester **Labor**
- Di Farmer – Bulimba **Labor**
- Shannon Fentiman – Waterford **Labor**
- Mark Furner – Ferny Grove **Labor**
- Julieanne Gilbert – Mackay **Labor**
- Grace Grace – McConnel **Labor**
- Aaron Harper – Thuringowa **Labor**
- Michael Hart – Burleigh **LNP**
- Michael Healy – Cairns **Labor**
- Stirling Hinchliffe – Sandgate **Labor**
- Jennifer Howard – Ipswich **Labor**
- Jason Hunt – Caloundra **Labor**
- Ali King – Pumicestone **Labor**
- Shane King – Kurwongbah **Labor**
- Dale Last – Burdekin **LNP**
- Brittany Lauga – Keppel **Labor**
- Leanne Linard – Nudgee **Labor**
- Cynthia Lui – Cook **Labor**
- Amy MacMahon – South Brisbane **Greens**
- Jim Madden – Ipswich West **Labor**

- James Martin – Stretton **Labor**
- Lance McCallum – Bundamba **Labor**
- Melissa McMahon – Macalister **Labor**
- Corrine McMillan – Mansfield **Labor**
- Brent Mickelberg – Buderim **LNP**
- Steven Miles – Murrumba **Labor**
- Steve Minnikin – Chatsworth **LNP**
- Rob Molhoek – Southport **LNP**
- Charis Mullen – Jordan **Labor**
- Tim Nicholls – Clayfield **LNP**
- Sam O'Connor – Bonney **LNP**
- Barry O'Rourke – Rockhampton **Labor**
- Anastacia Palaszczuk – Inala **Labor**
- Joan Pease – Lytton **Labor**
- Jess Pugh – Mount Ommaney **Labor**
- Kim Richards – Redlands **Labor**
- Peter Russo – Toohey **Labor**
- Mark Ryan – Morayfield **Labor**
- Bruce Saunders – Maryborough **Labor**
- Meaghan Scanlon – Gaven **Labor**
- Rob Skelton – Nicklin **Labor**
- Tom Smith – Bundaberg **Labor**
- Ray Stevens – Mermaid Beach **LNP**
- Scott Stewart – Townsville **Labor**
- Jimmy Sullivan – Stafford **Labor**
- Adrian Tantari – Hervey Bay **Labor**
- Les Walker – Mundingburra **Labor**
- Chris Whiting – Bancroft **Labor**

NO

- Steve Andrew – Mirani **One Nation**
- Ros Bates – Mudgeeraba **LNP**
- Stephen Bennett – Burnett **LNP**
- Jarrod Bleijie – Kawana **LNP**
- Colin Boyce – Callide **LNP**
- Amanda Camm – Whitsunday **LNP**
- David Crisafulli – Broadwater **LNP**
- Nick Dametto – Hinchinbrook **KAP**
- Deb Frecklington – Nanango **LNP**
- Laura Gerber – Currumbin **LNP**
- David Janetzki – Toowoomba South **LNP**
- Robbie Katter – Traeger **KAP**
- Joe Kelly – Greenslopes **Labor**
- Shane Knuth – Hill **KAP**
- Jon Krause – Scenic Rim **LNP**
- Ann Leahy – Warrego **LNP**
- James Lister – Southern Downs **LNP**
- Tim Mander – Everton **LNP**
- Jim McDonald – Lockyer **LNP**
- Bart Mellish – Aspley **Labor**
- Lachlan Millar – Gregory **LNP**
- Tony Perrett – Gympie **LNP**
- Andrew Powell – Glass House **LNP**
- Linus Power – Logan **Labor**
- Dan Purdie – Ninderry **LNP**
- Mark Robinson – Oodgeroo **LNP**
- Christian Rowan – Moggill **LNP**
- Fiona Simpson – Maroochydore **LNP**
- Trevor Watts – Toowoomba North **LNP**
- Pat Weir – Condamine **LNP**

NOTE:

Curtis Pitt – Mulgrave, Labor – publicly supported the VAD Bill. However, as Speaker of the Parliament Mr Pitt does not vote on Bills unless exercising a casting vote in the event of a tied vote.

NOT PRESENT

John-Paul Langbroek – Surfers Paradise **LNP** – was absent interstate due to COVID-19 restrictions

See story on page 6

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

Voluntary assisted dying is just that—voluntary.

This Bill gives a choice to end suffering for those who are dying and wish to see their life end on their own terms.

It respects the rights of individuals to participate or not. Where it must make a decision, it favours the right of the dying person but does so carefully and thoughtfully.

It protects the vulnerable. It empowers those who most need it in their dying days and it is compassionate.

We all want to live long, healthy and fulfilling lives. Dying peacefully without pain is one of the most wished for outcomes at the end of our days.

Why would a compassionate society deny that wish to someone already dying and suffering? Surely the most important focus for all of us is not how someone dies but how they lived.

Tim Nicholls
LNP Member for Clayfield

At its heart, this Bill is about easing the suffering of Queenslanders who are facing inevitable death within a relatively short period of time.

The Bill as written is designed around key principles intended to provide the right balance between the rights of individuals to access voluntary assisted dying and the rights of individuals to be protected from harm including coercion.

It dictates that human life is of fundamental importance and that every person has inherent dignity and should be treated equally, with compassion and respect.

Mark Furner
Labor Member for Ferny Grove

The key here is choice, and in Queensland this week we will be legislating the choice to die with dignity.

Amy MacMahon
Greens Member for South Brisbane

Is there no greater demonstration of love and compassion than to empower others at their end of life?

As relayed in submissions, choice takes away the angst, fear and anger that comes with the unknown and loss of control.

I am truly blessed to live in a community where those that would never consider VAD for themselves would not deny the right of choice to others.

Sandy Bolton
Independent Member for Noosa



Doctors welcome vote Implementation is new focus

The passage of the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021* through the Queensland Parliament means the focus of doctors supporting VAD now shifts from advocating for the new law and focussing on how it will be implemented.

The Queensland law is expected to be operational from January 2023.

In the coming 15 months the state government will work to establish our new VAD scheme, its oversight body, and the training programs for those medical professionals who choose to be involved in delivering VAD.

On 13 September, the evening before debate started on the Bill, a Vigil for VAD was held by supporters of the Bill outside Parliament House.

At that event we were reminded of the many people over many decades who fought for a VAD law either for themselves or for someone they knew.

Sadly the new law will come too late for many who have died whilst selflessly advocating for VAD. Most poignantly, it will come too late for people destined to succumb to their terminal or neurological disease during the 15-month period of implementing procedures and safeguards in accordance with the new law.

As has occurred in Victoria and Western Australia, in coming months doctors will begin the process of signing up to participate in our new VAD scheme and to help deliver the choice to those who choose it.

Also as has happened in those other states, peak bodies representing doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals will begin to work out their own arrangements to be involved.

Even the Australian Medical Association

whose leadership officially opposes VAD, has worked to help make the VAD systems there work as have its members.

Now that the VAD Bill has been passed, I want to take this opportunity to thank the many Queenslanders who helped achieve that very positive outcome.

Among the many groups and individuals who have been strong advocates are doctors and nurses who have seen the intolerable suffering of terminally ill people up close.

In particular I want to thank the members



Vigil for VAD outside Parliament House

of Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice who have worked so hard over many years to advocate for VAD both here and in other states.

Now that Queensland has joined four other states in passing a VAD law, attention now turns to the Private Member's Bill proposed for consideration by the NSW Parliament, and the right of the Northern Territory and the ACT to consider their own laws.

Our work will continue.



Dr Sid Finnigan MBBS, FRANZCO
Queensland Convenor
Doctors For Assisted
Dying Choice

KAP fails to derail debate on Bill

A move by the Katter's Australian Party to scrap debate on the VAD Bill and defer it indefinitely failed.

On the first day of debate KAP leader Robbie Katter (Traeger) moved a motion seeking to adjourn debate until what he described as adequate levels of funding for palliative care services in regional parts of

Queensland were made available.

Leader of government business in the House and Health Minister, Yvette D'Ath, described the motion as "a stunt" and said Queenslanders expected the Bill to be debated and voted upon.

The Katter motion was voted down 54/28.

Premier thanks QLRC

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

In her speech supporting the VAD Bill, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk cited the thorough work of the expert and independent Queensland Law Reform Commission to explain why the government would not accept any amendments to the legislation.

The Queensland Law Reform Commission did an excellent job with the Bill.

We are not tampering with the Bill because we let the experts get that Bill right. I introduced that Bill and I stand by the Bill that was introduced into this parliament.

The guidelines are a clear sign to people in this state, especially some of those church-based organisations, that our government is a government that listens.

I thank the Deputy Premier for working on those guidelines.

These guidelines have been extensively talked about and explained by the Deputy Premier.

The Bill provides a chain of safeguards to ensure only those at the end of life can make those choices and then only those



capable of making that choice for themselves.

This is what it comes down to.

This is about choice. This is not about me or anyone in this House telling someone else what to do.

This is about the choice of an individual to say how they wish to end their life with dignity.

Dignity is a word that I hold dear to me.

There is dignity in work. There is dignity in the family and the friends that surround you.

I believe strongly that people who are terminally ill and who are in unbearable pain and suffering deserve the right to choose their own end-of-life journey and to pass with care, compassion and dignity.

Put very simply, this Bill for me is about giving all Queenslanders the freedom of choice.

We are indeed blessed if we and those we love never have to make this very personal choice about how we pass, but knowing that that choice exists is something that brings me comfort and the many in this chamber who have expressed that same feeling.



It is in my heart of hearts the most compassionate and caring choice to make available to those with a terminal illness.

Every Queenslander should have this choice and I certainly do not believe that it is for me or anyone else in this place to deny dignity in death.

Kim Richards
Labor Member for Redlands

In recent months, I have had some deep discussions about the virtue of suffering, but I have to say that I am not convinced of the virtue of someone suffering in prolonged pain when they do not want to and when they do not have to.

Submissions to the health committee make it clear that not all people suffering from a terminal illness are able to be palliated to the extent that their pain is sufficiently minimised so that they have any meaningful quality of life. I acknowledge that such cases are the minority but, regardless, in my view Queenslanders should have the right to minimise their own pain and suffering, including by hastening their own death.

Brent Mickelberg
LNP Member for Buderim

This is about empowerment. It is about giving people choice. It is about Queenslanders supporting Queenslanders to make choices for themselves.

It is about people being given autonomy to make their own decisions about their end of life. These laws are about giving people back dignity and control in circumstances where it has been ripped away from them.

Most importantly, it is about compassion in the face of terrible suffering.

Lance McCallum
Labor Member for Bundamba

Duncan Pegg's words remembered

The recently elected MP for the Brisbane seat of Stretton, James Martin, spoke in the VAD Bill debate about his political predecessor, the late Duncan Pegg who died from cancer in June.

Mr Martin and many other MPs noted that in Mr Pegg's his last speech in parliament he had urged support for VAD laws.

"My views regarding this legislation have been profoundly influenced by my friend and former Member for Stretton, Duncan Pegg, and his journey with cancer," Mr Martin said.

"Duncan faced the end of his life with courage and dignity. I was present at the beginning of Duncan's journey, when he received his cancer diagnosis.

"I will never forget the look on the doctor's face or the look on Duncan's face. I will never forget how I felt.

"Family and friends who have been in this situation will know well the initial feelings of shock that come with this kind of news.

"It is this experience which has informed my view that these laws are just as necessary for terminally ill patients at the

beginning of their journey as at the end."

Mr Martin said Duncan Pegg's final speech "was one of the most powerful and dignified speeches I have ever heard".

"He stated clearly what he knew: that people with a terminal illness do not want to die; they fight to live every day," he said.

Mr Martin said when he voted for the VAD Bill he would be thinking of all terminally ill Queenslanders and Duncan Pegg.

He said he wanted people at the end of life to have the choice of VAD, describing it as "the choice of how to conclude your journey here on this planet and the choice of how you move beyond this life".

"I want you to have an option to avoid suffering that is there for you, if you so choose. I hope there is some comfort in that," he said.



Duncan Pegg

MP's strange logic

The LNP MP for Everton, Tim Mander, relied on several discredited arguments to justify his stand against the VAD Bill.

However, despite being given a conscience vote freeing him from his party's official policy stance he said his "no" vote would also be based on the LNP's anti-VAD policy.

Mr Mander said the 11,000-plus LNP members in Queensland had joined the party to be part of its policy development.

"In 2019 — the last time the party had a chance to debate policy resolutions — the issue of voluntary assisted dying was revisited and debated," he said.

"The result was that a healthy majority of LNP members did not support the policy.

"Whilst I appreciate that LNP members of parliament have been granted a conscience vote — and I agree with that — I also believe that LNP members are looking for their members of parliament to support the policies they have passed at our conventions, and I intend to respect their opinion," Mr Mander said.

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

Queenslanders deserve the very best as they face the end of their lives.

In the two parliamentary inquiries not one witness came before either committee to say: 'As a dying person I do not believe Queenslanders should have a choice at end of life.'

Some said: 'I don't know if I personally would choose to use voluntary assisted dying', but all wanted terminally ill people to be free to make their own decisions.

Dying people told us over and over that even if they will not live to see voluntary assisted dying enacted, they want others to have choice.

They told us they were not afraid of death, but of dying in pain and without dignity.

Over and over, terminally ill people told the committee that they would not be choosing between palliative care and voluntary assisted dying; they would be choosing both.



As we make these historic decisions, it is the voices of terminally ill Queenslanders we should listen to most carefully and who must be at the heart of our decisions. They deserve no less than that.

Ali King
Labor Member for Pumicestone and Health Committee Member

Something that has really struck me in the last few days is the stories about people who chose to take their own life — sometimes violently, typically alone — far too soon because they did not have a choice.

I think about how precious every moment is, and I think about the extra time that people diagnosed with a terminal illness might have missed with their family because they did not have a choice.

Mick de Brenni
Labor Member for Springwood



The campaign for VAD continues

NSW and the territories should pass their own laws

Five of the six Australian states have now passed laws establish a system of voluntary assisted dying.

The campaign here in Queensland has been a long one because until the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021* was introduced, our parliament has never had a serious discussion, let alone a formal debate on VAD.

As those involved on either side of the Queensland VAD campaign would know, the world's first VAD law was enacted in 1995 by Marshall Perron, the former chief minister of the Northern Territory.

The pioneering law was the target of a Private Member's Bill passed in the Federal Parliament with the support of MPs on all sides of politics.

The federal law effectively scrapped the NT's law which ended up being in force for only nine months in which only four people could take advantage of its provisions.

The federal law also applies to the ACT.



Everal Compton AO
Christians for Voluntary Assisted Dying Queensland



Dr Peter Catt, Everal Compton, and the Rev Andrew Gunton

It was wrong to ban the NT's VAD law and wrong to stop it and the ACT from considering a VAD law at all.

The federal law must be scrapped and I will be campaigning to achieve that. So our work as VAD advocates will continue even after the Queensland law has been passed.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the MPs who supported the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill*. They have cast their votes to benefit some of the most vulnerable Queenslanders at the most vulnerable time of their lives.

I also thank those MPs who did not support the Bill for the way in which they exercised their right not to agree with what was in the legislation.

I don't believe much was gained by the stridency of some of those involved in promoting the "no" case. I strived to present my case in a polite and reasoned manner.

This approach was in evidence in the last days before the vote on the Bill when I appeared on ABC radio with the Dean of Brisbane's St John's Anglican Cathedral and the moderator of my own Uniting Church, the Reverend Andrew Gunton. We had a valuable discussion and canvassed the evidence and facts of the issue.

I believe that type of approach is what worked well with the vast majority of our state MPs who voted for the Bill.

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

What we are debating in parliament this week may not be pleasant, but it is an essential discussion on the great circle of life.

We all come into this world and, if we are lucky, work hard, take measured risks and have emotional support from family and friends, we may get to live what is described as a good life.



I believe we also need to give people who fulfil the essential criteria under this Bill the option to voluntarily have a good death.

This Bill is about an individual's right to exercise control over the last decision they will probably ever make. This Bill is about choice.

This Bill is about freedom. This Bill is about agency. This Bill is about respect. This Bill is about rights. This Bill is about autonomy.

This Bill is about compassion. This Bill is about dignity. This Bill is one which I support.

Steve Minnikin
LNP Member for Chatsworth

This is a deeply personal matter and the centre of the decision should be around the people who are suffering with life-limiting conditions and their right to make a choice about their end of life.

I have had many conversations over the past three years with people with a wide range of opinions: people who want the bill to go further and faith-based people who believe there should be no legislation at all.

I believe that people should be afforded the ability to make their own decision about their death when the time comes without the belief systems of others being placed over their personal decisions.

Julianne Gilbert
Labor Member for Mackay

This is a Bill about choice and compassion. It is a bill about control and bodily autonomy.

It is not a Bill about dying so much as it is about dignity.

We will never find a universally acceptable position on an issue that is so deeply embedded in our individual values and beliefs.



However, we are a secular society and there is simply no denying that the majority of the people we represent support choice, autonomy and dignity at the end of the life.

Michael Berkman
Greens Member for Maiwar

Speaker has his say

The Speaker of the Parliament, Curtis Pitt, took the unusual step of vacating the chair to participate briefly in the VAD Bill debate.

As Speaker, Mr Pitt who is also the Member for Mulgrave near Cairns, does not normally vote on Bills or motions in the parliament.

"Members would be aware that as Speaker I would not be required to vote on this Bill unless to break a deadlock with a casting vote," Mr Pitt said.



Speaker Curtis Pitt takes part in debate from the floor of State Parliament

"I wish to place on record that if I had a vote I would support this Bill and all that is entailed in terms of consideration in detail."

Mr Pitt said the message he had received from Queenslanders was that they valued human life "and also the inherent belief

that we should all live with dignity".

"In relation to the principle of voluntary assisted dying, I have had a long-held view that where palliative care is ineffective and people face a future of intolerable pain and suffering then voluntary assisted dying may provide an opportunity for those suffering to die with dignity and on their own terms," he said.

"Voluntary assisted dying only changes the time of a certain death at the choice of the terminally ill person. I support the rights of capable and informed individuals to make their own choice on what is a very complex issue."

Mr Pitt said the VAD Bill provided "an ethical and robust framework to allow for voluntary assisted dying that will not compromise our belief in preserving human life".

"The availability of voluntary assisted dying to the terminally ill, even if not utilised, will provide support and mental comfort to the terminally ill. Indeed, the families of the terminally ill will also find comfort in knowing their loved ones have the choice to end their intolerable and unavoidable suffering.

"The desire to alleviate the suffering of others is perhaps the most human of qualities. It is that intrinsic desire that motivates me to speak in support of this Bill," Mr Pitt said.

LNP MP tackles anti-VAD claims

Gold Coast LNP MP Sam O'Connor used his speech in debate on the VAD Bill to rebut some of the arguments touted by opponents of voluntary assisted dying.

The Member for Bonney discounted the "slippery slope" argument favoured by opponents as well as the claim that VAD should not be introduced until palliative care was better resourced.

"I have heard many people argue about what happens overseas, claiming that these laws will lead to such situations occurring in Queensland," Mr O'Connor said. "All I will say is that any changes would require a future parliament to pass amendments.

"That is entirely a decision for our society going forward and it should not blur the decision we have to make around this particular proposal.

"Palliative care has also come up a lot in our considerations. As Palliative Care Queensland states: 'In Australia, an individual's choice to explore voluntary assisted dying should never be a choice based on a lack of access to palliative care.' I wholeheartedly agree with that statement.

"It is vital and it needs more funding, but palliative care alone cannot alleviate all pain. Also, palliative care should not be the only choice available to people who have been told they are medically determined to die within a year.

"I think the funding boost will go a long way towards providing access to many more Queenslanders.

"While the concerns around palliative care are valid, are we really expecting the opponents of VAD to change their minds even if palliative care is funded to their desired level?"

"We can do more than one thing at a time.

"We can support the introduction of these laws whilst also calling for more funding for palliative care.

"To wrap up, I know my decision to vote for this Bill will disappoint some but in considering my conscience, my community and the laws themselves, I cannot stand in the way of choice," Mr O'Connor said.



Those who never use the law benefit too

VAD law pioneer, former NT chief minister Marshall Perron, seen here with Deputy Premier Steven Miles, argues that the new Queensland VAD law will help even those who never end up using it.



In any debate about whether voluntary assisted dying should be legalised or not there is one group often overlooked.

It is in fact, probably the largest group of citizens who will benefit from a VAD law.

The people I refer to are those who will never apply to use it. Elderly Australians advise me that simply having the option of VAD would relieve them of a great burden.

Whilst in reasonable health now, many experience anxiety every day, knowing the ageing process cannot be halted – the possibility of a miserable lingering death constantly on their mind. If they thought they had the option, hopefully never to be taken, they could face each day with the comfort of knowing that they will not experience the suffering that they have witnessed in others.

This has been described as the parachute syndrome. Travellers by air hope they never need a parachute however the knowledge one is available when the engine splutters brings great relief.

Suggestions that legalising voluntary assisted dying will lead to devaluing human life are nonsense. The will to live is probably the most powerful force in nature.

Despite this, the evidence shows the overwhelming majority of Queensland adults value quality of life over quantity.

They desire the option of voluntary assistance to hasten their death if the ravages of terminal disease make life unbearable.

Official figures from the National Coronial Information System show 84 self-inflicted deaths a year in our state by people with terminal or debilitating physical conditions.

The passage of voluntary assisted dying legislation will reduce anxiety and trauma in our society even before anyone applies to take advantage of its provisions.

Coroners in three states that held parliamentary inquiries into end-of-life issues reported suicide by people with a terminal or debilitating chronic illness is not uncommon. – shockingly violent suicides by people who believed they had no alternative but to act while they still had the capacity to do so.

We have no way of knowing how many of the terminally ill who have killed themselves, would have lived days, weeks or months longer, had they been able to arrange for a willing assistant to help them die peacefully and legally when they wanted to.

Occasionally we hear of murder/suicides, where a healthy partner assisted a suffering loved one to die then killed themselves, possibly to avoid the odium of a very public criminal trial. A sad and needless waste of life.

The trauma such events leave in their wake can only be imagined. The effects not only impact family and friends but first responders, paramedics and the police.

If the terminally ill have a right to die with dignity at a time they choose, the situation can be very different. There is also evidence that having access to the means to die can reinvigorate the will to live. The reason being that the individual knows they are in control of when they will die.

The passage of voluntary assisted dying legislation will reduce anxiety and trauma in our society even before anyone applies to take advantage of its provisions. It will reduce the incidence of violent suicide and delay other deaths to a time much closer to when death would have occurred naturally.

These benefits are rarely considered in any voluntary assisted dying debate.

Marshall Perron is a former Northern Territory Chief Minister and architect and sponsor of the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995 – the first legislation to permit voluntary assisted dying anywhere in the world which took effect in 1996 but which was overturned soon after by federal legislation.

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

This bill is part of a long and considered process to weigh up whether Queenslanders who are dying should have a choice over the time and circumstances of their death.

End-of-life choices are very personal and can be and are very often difficult for all those involved.

I do believe, however, that supporting those in our community to have the right and opportunity to make an informed decision about how they die will provide great dignity at the end of life.

For many, VAD may not be an option, but for others, if they are eligible, it will provide the comfort and an additional end-of-life choice

alongside palliative care and that is why I am supporting voluntary assisted dying.

The VAD Bill, as I have said, will allow eligible people who are dying to choose the timing and circumstances of their death if that is what they want to do.

Voluntary assisted dying and other end-of-life choices are extremely complex and deeply personal issues.

The Bill is to give people who are suffering



and dying and who meet that criteria the option of requesting medical assistance to end their lives.

It is not a way to end life for those who are not dying.

Today I am filled with hope. I have cried with, I have comforted and listened to so many Queenslanders over the last three years, and I am so proud to stand here today to support this bill, to give my voice and my commitment to the many supporters who put their trust in me. Quite simply, it is time.

**Joan Pease
Labor Member for Lytton
Health Committee Member since 2018**

DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

Here is the reality today: in Queensland right now it is legal, if you are dying and suffering beyond medical help, to end this suffering by committing suicide, often violently and almost always alone.

It is legal to refuse all medical treatment, food and water and to die slowly of starvation or dehydration while your disease takes its course.

It is legal for a doctor to provide a combination of approved drugs knowing that it will likely put you into a coma while your family waits for days or weeks for you to die.

It is possible, and we have heard the stories, that this can happen without your consent.

However, it is not legal, if you are dying and suffering beyond medical help, to end that suffering medically and with the supervision of a doctor.

Consequently, we know that a person with terminal illness dies by suicide each week in Queensland, that many more attempt suicide and survive, often with additional health complications as a result of their injuries, that individual doctors are absorbing all of the risk of having to provide the correct combination and amount of pain relieving medication that accords with a person's wishes while still remaining within the boundaries of their professional ethics without a formal legal framework for even talking about euthanasia, and that terminal sedation is occurring, at times without the informed consent of the person or their families.

We have an opportunity to make this better.

Jonty Bush
Labor Member for Cooper

In my view, it is intellectually and philosophically compatible to want to support the best interests of individuals who are literally dying with intolerable pain, as well as being concerned about protecting against a cultural move or underlying pressure that inappropriately would place a sense of responsibility on older Australians to "not be a burden".

Those two intertwined concerns, in my opinion, not only were considered by the parliamentary inquiry and the QLRC but are in fact settled in the model we have delivered.

Indeed, I think that is the core achievement of the QLRC framework.



People of all backgrounds come at this issue predominantly and genuinely with love and care.

I think this model delivers for those who are genuinely engaged in this issue—those from both points of view.

Jimmy Sullivan
Labor Member for Stafford

I did not make my decision to support this Bill without many hours of discussion with those who are living the life of known health uncertainties.

I have spoken many times with people who say they would never access VAD and I have spoken with people who are holding on to desperate hope that the Bill will be passed in time to give them a feeling of control over end-of-life decisions.

Some acknowledge that they may change their mind when the time comes.

However, almost exclusively those facing the fact that their time on earth is limited by a serious health diagnosis agree that the choice must be theirs — not yours, not mine.

Glenn Butcher
Labor Member for Gladstone

At the outset I wish to make it clear that I intend to support the bill at all stages through its passage through the House.

I do so, however, with a troubled conscience.

I accept that there is strong community support for this legislative change and I intend to reflect that support in how I cast my vote on the bill.

At the same time, I have formed the view that this change entrenches a profound and irreversible transformation in how our society regards the preciousness and sanctity of human life.

The ramifications of this change are significant, including on the practice of medicine and the delivery of health care in this state.

Cameron Dick
Labor Member for Woodridge

Like others in this chamber, many people have reached out to me with their points of view on the Bill.

Some people were strongly opposed to it. Some had researched and formed their views.



Sadly, there were others whose point of view was based on incorrect claims and who demonstrated to me that they would not take the time to understand the fallacy of those claims.

Those claims included that the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill will force people or workplaces to participate in voluntary assisted dying against their will; that nurses and other clinical staff may be forced to handle lethal drugs and be exposed to euthanising vulnerable people under their care; that the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill will expose people to criminal investigation if they discuss other options to voluntary assisted dying with their loved ones or those that they provide care for; that it will force hospitals and aged-care facilities to act contrary to deep philosophical objections; that people will be forced to go against their will and they will be pressured to take their life; that wrongful deaths will occur from incorrect diagnosis and prognosis, coercion and elder abuse; and that, if passed, the bill will be likely to lead to an increase in the total number of Queenslanders who die by suicide. Those claims are wrong.

A review of the proposed legislation shows the error of the claims.

Peter Russo
Labor Member for Tooley

Just as death is certain, so too is change.

As legislators, it is our role to provide Queensland with a safe, considered and workable framework that reflects the wishes of modern Queensland. This Bill delivers that.

Palliative care and VAD are not mutually exclusive, and I do not subscribe to arguments that prioritise one over the other. They can work in parallel and intersect.

Fundamentally, I believe that terminally ill people should be able to choose the way they depart this world.

Once provided with that choice research tells us that many do not enact it, but it brings great comfort and relief in the knowledge that choice and control exist for them.

I wholeheartedly support this legislation.

Nikki Boyd
Labor Member for Pine Rivers



Police past shapes 'yes' vote for two MPs

The LNP MP for Burdekin, Dale Last, and the Labor MP for Macalister, Melissa McMahon, said their previous work as police officers helped them determine their views on voluntary assisted dying legislation.

Since this Bill was first tabled, I have taken the opportunity to seek feedback from my constituents because, on issues of life and death, they deserve to have their opinions not only listened to but genuinely heard.

From day one, I told my constituents, the media and others that I would vote according to the will of my electorate and, as their voice in this parliament, I will do just that.

I have seen my fair share of death over 25 years as a police officer, and one of the primary reasons that I am supporting this legislation today is because of the number of deaths that I have attended where Queenslanders have taken their own life. In many of these cases the victims took their own life because they had run out of options.

There was no support, counselling services or medical treatment available and, as a consequence, many of these people died in the most tragic and horrific of circumstances.

I am talking about people taking strychnine, of using firearms, or throwing themselves in front of a train or a motor vehicle.

Sure, a lot of these victims were not suffering from a terminal illness, but a lot of them were.

If you think about the impact on loved ones, on emergency service personnel and those people who may have witnessed the event, you can appreciate the difference that having that choice of voluntary assisted dying could have made.



The image that is burned into my mind is from well over 20 years ago—an elderly gentleman who, following his diagnosis, saw no other option but to jump from the window of the bedroom he now occupied at his daughter's house.

It was not so much that he would be a burden to his daughter and her own young family but that he could not stand the indignity of what lay ahead of him in front of his children. His family were devastated.

The scene was gruesome, to say the least. They were prepared for a long and painful journey they thought would ultimately be his death.

What they were not prepared for was a man determined to go on his own terms. The choice that was left for him was devastating for them.

This one job has stayed with me—this experience and those visuals. That family does not live there anymore. Could you imagine remaining in that house?

I am reminded of this job every single day — this house, this driveway. I drive past it every day on the way to my kids' school. I drive past it thinking: 'What is it that went through that man's head when he made that decision?'

It certainly was not an easy task for him physically to climb out that window. Did he know how his actions would impact his family?

When he made the decision, what other options could have been available to him?

What if he had had a choice?' That is what this Bill is about: choice.

I would like to think that if this VAD framework had been in place, the death of a terminally ill loved one might not have been avoided but certainly the trauma around his death could have been.



DEBATE HIGHLIGHTS:

The fact is the current law is unjust and it is a contravention of Queenslanders' basic human rights because it enforces one particular view upon people.

That is wrong and it must be changed by this parliament this week.

This Bill this week is where we can play a positive role with the satisfaction that we have helped take an immeasurable amount of unnecessary pain away from some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Mark Bailey
Labor Member for Miller

I hope that when this Bill becomes legislation my family and I never have to use it.

I hope we never have to use voluntary assisted dying, but let me tell honourable members I will fight for their right to have the option and the choice to do so should they face death in the future and want to use this legislation.

I am hoping they never do

Grace Grace
Labor Member for McConnell

MY LIFE MY CHOICE

The My Life My Choice newsletter is produced by the Clem Jones Group, Dying With Dignity Queensland, Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice (Qld), and Christians for Voluntary Assisted Dying (Qld) for the dominant purpose of educating and raising awareness of voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland and other states and territories.



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