

Dying *with* Dignity Tasmania (Inc)

PO Box1022
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Tasmania 7006

your right to choose

www.dwdtas.org.au

July 2009

SPECIAL EDITION – TASMANIA’S DYING WITH DIGNITY BILL

DwDTas Committee

Mike Harris (President)
Margaret Sing (Vice President)
Trish Kershaw (Treasurer)
Kay Scurr (Secretary)

Beatrice Bentley
Allan Cameron
Helen Cutts
Barbara Porter
Marian van den Byllaardt
Noel Woodrow

CURRENT SITUATION RE DWD BILL

In June, Nick McKim, leader of the Greens in the Tasmanian parliament, had tabled a private members bill on dying with dignity. In the week preceding Dr Syme’s visit parliament had voted to adjourn the bill to a joint standing committee for consideration, and with a report-back date of early October 2009.

Thanks to those generous members who committed some of their money to helping our DwDTas people to attend the meeting etc

WHAT ACTION CAN YOU TAKE ?

- **Submission to joint parliamentary committee**

You are urged to present a written submission to the committee.

There is no specific format/length required. Your submission may, for example, be a personal story or arguments to support the Bill.

Submissions should be addressed to:

Secretary, Joint Standing Committee on Community Development,
Parliament House,
Hobart, 7000.

Closing date for submissions: Friday, 31 July 2009

For a copy of the Bill - http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/bills/pdf/37_of_2009.pdf

Please let DwDTas have a copy of your draft submission for our campaign record.

Guidelines for submissions

We urge all members to put in a submission **by 31 July 2009** to the inquiry into the Dying with Dignity Bill 2009. This is the Bill introduced as a Private Member's Bill by Nick McKim. Submissions can be about the Bill or "any incidental matters".

There will be a comprehensive submission submitted on behalf of Dwd Tasmania but it's extremely important that as many people as possible who support voluntary euthanasia put one in.

Submissions need to be in writing but don't be put off by this - they can be as simple as a few handwritten sentences. **The important thing is to get them in by the due date.** Please also encourage others who support voluntary euthanasia to make their views known to the Committee.

If you or anyone else you know wants any help in doing this, please contact Dwd Tas Vice-President, Margaret Sing, on 62348280, as soon as possible. She is happy to write up people's views and get them back for their signature.

Members of Dwd Tas are well aware of the issues in this debate and are able to decide what they want to include in their submissions. We suggest, however, that you do not attack those opposed to the Bill but focus on your personal views and reasons for supporting the legislation. If you or any of your family and friends want any more information, you'll find a range of material on our website or can get it by calling the President, Mike Harris on 0407 923156, Vice-President (see above) or one of the Dwd Tas committee.

Submissions should be addressed to the Secretary, Joint Standing Committee on Community Development, Parliament House, Hobart. The Committee is also encouraging emailed submissions to committees@parliament.tas.gov.au. Make sure you put your name, phone number and postal address on emailed submissions.

As you know the inquiry is being done by the Tasmanian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Community Development. The Committee has four members from the House of Assembly and four from the Legislative Council. It is due to report its findings to Parliament by 2 October 2009. The Committee may invite some people to give oral submissions as well as written ones.

Guidelines for witnesses and the preparation of a submission are available on the internet at <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au> or by contacting the Secretary of the Committee on (03) 6233 2248

- **Write to your MPs**
In addition or as an alternative (given the tight time schedule for submissions) you are urged to write to your MPs to indicate that you support the DWD Bill and that you see this as an election issue. You may have a personal story to tell.
- **Go and see your elected politicians**
Personal meetings are a very effective way of presenting your arguments.
- **Write to the press**
A letter to one of the newspapers – by mail or email – will ensure that that newspaper keeps the issue alive. You may be like the editor of this newsletter and never seem to get your letter published but it is worthwhile as it helps others to get published!!

Dr Rodney Syme visits Hobart (2 – 5 July 2009)

Members of Parliament were invited to meet with Dr Syme about the issue of voluntary

euthanasia. DwDTas was delighted that nine MPs took up this offer (one of whom was the Deputy Premier), in a set of seven interviews. Another MP (Ruth Forrest) also requested an interview but, unfortunately, it was too late for it to be fitted into his packed schedule, so she will see him in Melbourne. Those who met him were: Lara Giddings, Deputy Premier; Kerry Finch, Chair of the Committee examining the PAD Bill; Ross Butler; Steven Kons; Nick McKim; Tim Morris; Sue Napier; Daniel Hulme; and Paul Harriss. Dr Syme also presented each MP with a copy of his book "A Good Death".

This is about one-quarter of the Tasmanian MPs took the time to speak with Dr Syme. Given the short notice and the business of politicians this is a commendable level of involvement by them.

The visit also gave Dr Syme the opportunity for a discussion with Professor Margaret Otlowski of the University of Tasmania, the author of a major work on voluntary euthanasia and the common law.

Dr Syme held a press interview at Parliament House on Thursday 2 July and, on the Friday was a guest on Tim Cox's ABC morning show. He addressed a Public Lecture in Glenorchy, following the DwDTas AGM at which the press were again in attendance, and his talk was written up as the headline article in the Mercury the following day, and followed up with a further article on July 7. Dr Syme's speech is available on www.dwdtas.org.au.

A final highlight for DwDTas members was the workshop on Saturday morning, July 4. This three-hour workshop provided valuable information on the current law and enabled attendees to engage in more detailed discussion.

Overall, an enormously busy and productive trip, greatly appreciated by the committee and members of Dying with Dignity Tasmania.

Outline of what needs to happen if bill is to pass

Nick McKim's Dying with Dignity bill (a private member's bill) was tabled in the House of Assembly in June 2009. It has been given to the Joint Standing Committee on Community Development for consideration, with a report back to parliament due on 2 October 2009.

The members of that committee are: Kerry Finch, Ruth Forrest, Michael Gaffney, Terry Martin, Brenton Best, Heather Butler, Cassy O'Connor, Brett Whiteley.

It is expected that the bill will be debated and voted on by parliament before the end of this year. If there is any delay the matter may well fall into abeyance because of the scheduled March 2010 lower house election.

DwDTas Workshop

Dr Rodney Syme's three-hour inter-active workshop on Saturday 4 July, was filled to capacity and appreciated by all the participants. There was a discussion of the current state of the law in Tasmania and how best use can be made of enduring guardianships and advance health care directives. Participants were able to ask questions at any stage of the workshop and were invited to share their information and stories.



You might like to note:

- Enduring guardianship forms are available from the Guardianship and Administration Board, GPO Box 1307 (1st Floor, 54 Victoria Street), Hobart Tas 7001
Phone: 1300 799 625 Email: guardianship@justice.tas.gov.au
- For an enduring guardianship to be enforceable, it must be registered with the Board. It is recommended that you record your registration number on the card that is supplied at registration.
- You do not need to engage a solicitor to draw up your enduring guardianship form but, if you do, you need to be aware that any registration number and consequent copies of the enduring guardianship form will be sent to your solicitor and there is the possibility that these may not be forwarded on to you.
- A general advance health care directive, together with more specific ones for nursing homes, motor neuron disease, AIDs, Alzheimer's disease and dementia, as refined by Dr Syme in the light of his experience, will be available on the DwDTas website or by request to P O Box 1022, Sandy Bay 7006.
- Copies of your enduring guardianship and the advance health care directive should be delivered (i.e. personally or by Express Post so you have a receipt) to your doctors and also the legal officer at whichever hospital(s) you are admitted to.

Vale Rob Cordover

Rob Cordover, who lived with his family at Allens Rivulet, was diagnosed some nine months ago with motor neuron disease(MND). In the months leading up to his death on 22 June 2009, Rob campaigned hard for the right of Tasmanians for legalized voluntary euthanasia.

MND affects the nerve cells (neurons) controlling the muscles that enable us to move around, speak, breathe and swallow. As these nerve cells collapse, the muscles waste away the MND sufferer thus loses the ability to perform these functions normally and finally becomes completely dependent on others for everything. An inevitable consequence of this illness is pain – both physical and existential. The mind remains clear. Life expectancy is reduced to perhaps up to five years but rates of progression differ greatly.

Although Rob was unable to speak and could barely use his hands, he continued to write in support of Nick McKim's Dying with Dignity Bill. He ended his life on 22 June, unable to communicate his final plans to his family for fear of in some way implicating them.

DwDTas is proud to have known him.

PUBLIC MEETINGS FOR NORTHERN TASMANIA

The DwDTas committee are very much aware that particularly in recent weeks, most events take place around Hobart. Members from other regions may well feel left out but to help redress the balance we are planning a couple of public meetings to be held closer to the time when the Dying with Dignity Bill is debated but need your help and support.

We looking for members that know of a suitable meeting room in their area that could accommodate around 30 people. If you know of a suitable venue in your area please get in touch with: Allan Cameron,
PO Box 22, Ross, Tasmania 7209.
Phone: 6381 5239 email: ea.apcameron@bigpond.com

Last words in this newsletter go to the Count of Monte Cristo:

"Maximilian," said the count, "the friends that we have lost do not repose in the bosom of the earth, but are buried deep in our hearts, and it has been thus ordained that we may always be accompanied by them. I have two friends, who in this way never depart from me; the one who gave me being, and the other who conferred knowledge and intelligence on me. Their spirits live in me. I consult them when doubtful, and if I ever do any good, it is due to their beneficent counsels. Listen to the voice of your heart, Morrel, and ask it whether you ought to preserve this melancholy exterior towards me."

(Alexandre Dumas)