

Canberra Declaration

Protecting our Australian Values

5 September, 2018

Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

Please Do Not Decriminalise Abortion in Queensland

Dear Committee Members,

This submission is made by the **Canberra Declaration** which has been signed by over 70,000 Australian citizens of which nearly 20,000 are Queenslanders. We oppose the **Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018** and ask you to vigorously recommend against it.

Under the heading '**Human Life**' the Canberra Declaration states – "**We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life's natural end. The very heart of a humane and civilised society is based on the way it treats its most vulnerable and innocent members including the unborn and the disabled. We therefore insist on the right of all persons, including those who are vulnerable and dependent, to protection from conception to natural death. ... We will not comply with any directive that compels us to participate in or facilitate abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, euthanasia or any other act that involves the intentional taking of innocent human life.**" (underlining added)

In the light of what is stated in the Canberra Declaration about human life beginning at "**conception**" and "**the sanctity of human life**" we strongly oppose the practice of abortion as the deliberate and state-sanctioned termination of the lives of unborn babies.

We are therefore deeply dismayed that our giving evidence before the **Queensland Abortion Law Reform Inquiry Committee** in response to the first Pyne Bill on 1 August 2016, alongside many other pro-life groups, seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Back then our submission was one of 1347 submissions of which the overwhelming majority were pro-life.

In addition, two Galaxy polls conducted in May 2016 and August 2018, as well as the two largest ever Queensland Parliament e-petitions with a total of 54,604 signatures, showed that Queenslanders are firmly against abortion.

It is therefore unconscionable that, despite all this, the **Queensland Law Reform Commission** drafted the **Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018**. There is next to no evidence that any pro-life concerns have been taken into account. In its present form the Bill seems to be a capitulation to the position of the nine Labor members of **Emily's List** which, as a feminist organisation, doesn't tolerate any restrictions on abortion, even for viable full-term babies. Should this Bill become law we believe Queensland will have what are possibly the worst abortion laws in the Western world.

Our gravest concern is that the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 in effect allows abortion right up until the day of birth for any reason. The requirement that two doctors must approve an abortion after 22 weeks gestation, the age of viability, is taken to the extreme. Both doctors could work for

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the same abortion clinic which as a business has a profit motive. It appears that the second doctor is not required to see or even speak with the mother considering an abortion. Then if an abortion does take place without the approval of two doctors there is no penalty. All this seems to be mere window-dressing in order to get the Bill passed.

Next we are appalled that this Bill offers no safeguards for women who are considering an abortion – no independent counselling, informed consent conditions or cooling-off period. Women are forever changed by abortion. There is overwhelming evidence about the serious physical and emotional effects on women, and as a consequence, on their families. Physically, women become more prone to infection, haemorrhage, infertility and breast cancer. Emotionally, women become more prone to depression, suicide, drug and alcohol dependence, sexual promiscuity and poor self-esteem. Spiritually, women are devastated with the knowledge that they have decided to kill the baby that was within them. Abortion robs women of the dignity and beauty of who they are as women. It violates their nature as mothers who bring forth life and then nurture and cherish their babies. We feel for women who leave abortion clinics with empty arms and wounded hearts.

At the same time we do empathize with women in desperate situations who choose abortion for psycho-social reasons such as abandonment, coercion and desperation. Then are also those who choose abortions for financial concerns, educational aspirations and career paths. Still others choose abortion for eugenic reasons or sex selection. While the reasons to choose abortion are many and varied we believe abortion is never a just or wise solution except in the rare instance where the mother's life is at risk. Abortion results in the intentional killing of the unborn baby who is a person and also as described above has serious long-term consequences for the mother. Pregnancy help centres have many success stories in helping women with unplanned or unwanted pregnancies.

Men too can be traumatised through abortion but the Bill does not take this into account. When a man is confronted with the reality that he has allowed his own child to be killed through abortion he can be overwhelmed by anger, hurt, shame, guilt, grief or feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. He might see himself as too weak to prevent the death of his unborn child, his own flesh and blood. At the very core of what it means for him to be a man, the ability to provide and protect has been seriously shaken. Abortion can generate considerable resentment and mistrust in a man toward women as well as sexual dysfunction and impotency. As a result many men suppress their emotions and seek solace in drugs, alcohol, pornography and risky behaviour like extreme sports and driving too fast.

Another area of concern is the proposed 150-metre exclusion zone around abortion clinics. We see this as a serious infringement of the freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

Under the heading **'Religious Freedom'** the Canberra Declaration states – **"Religious freedom includes freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. The importance of these freedoms is shown in countries where they are threatened or absent. ... We affirm the basic necessity of freedom of conscience ... If these freedoms are removed – even in the name of supposed benefits – the prized values of democracy and liberty are seriously undermined. ... Thus the signers of this**

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declaration affirm the fundamental right of Australians to religious freedom and freedom of speech, and we oppose legislation which denies such freedoms.”

It is not our desire that any person entering or leaving an abortion clinic should feel harassed or intimidated. But the proposed exclusion zones poses a threat to the freedoms mentioned above. This means that a peaceful presence such as a prayer vigil could become a criminal offence. In the ACT, Kerry Mellor, who is part of a group that has been praying outside an abortion clinic every Friday for the last 18 years, was charged on 29 July 2016 for praying silently on the street within the exclusion zone. Angela Shanahan detailed his situation in her article in the Weekend Australian on 30 July 2016, *‘Silent Protest Against Abortion Hasn’t Got a Prayer’*.

Many of us having taken part in such prayer vigils know that the prayers offered in view of the clinic are meant for the welfare of the mothers in difficult circumstances, the babies whose lives are in danger of being lost and for the clinic staff and employees who are caught up in a business that generates wealth through the killing of unborn babies. Many babies’ lives have been saved through such peaceful prayer vigils and their mothers have been thankful.

Also in regard to religious freedom is the freedom of conscience of doctors who believe in the sanctity of human life yet would be forced to participate in abortions by referring their patients to doctors who would perform an abortion. Since the doctor who does not comply could be at risk for losing his medical practice, this is a blatant form of coercion by the state. To make things worse no mention is made in this Bill for other medical staff such as nurses and technicians whose freedom of conscience would be violated by taking part in an abortion.

This Bill would make it legal in Queensland to kill defenceless and voiceless unborn human beings using the most horrific and inhumane methods imaginable. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It is abhorrent that this Bill was tabled with the full knowledge of recent research which confirms that unborn babies can feel emotions and pain in the second trimester of gestation. It is repugnant to us that the **Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018** means giving mothers the exclusive right to kill their own babies by violating their maternal instincts. We believe reverence for human life is an essential feature of a humane and civilised society. Any society, therefore, which can tolerate abortion on this scale has ceased to be civilised.

Science confirms that from the moment of conception a new human life comes into being with his or her own unique set of chromosomes and potentialities. At three weeks, the baby’s heart begins to beat. At six weeks, the baby has brain waves that can be detected by EEG. At eight weeks, the unborn baby swims freely in the amniotic sac. As the baby develops in its mother’s womb he or she can experience emotions as well as physical pain. Ultrasound clearly shows that the unborn baby at its various stages as a **person**. It is no wonder that many expectant mothers who are considering an abortion change their minds after seeing an ultrasound of their baby. We therefore maintain the **personhood** of an unborn baby from the moment of conception and disagree with its brutal abortion at any stage. This then precludes the setting of any gestational limits.

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Through abortion human life is devalued and commodified. The sacredness of every human life is ignored. In June 2016 the Health Minister for Queensland said that between 2005 and 2015 records show that 204 Queensland babies were born alive after failed late-term abortions and left to die unattended. The Bill in its current form would allow sex-selective abortions and abortion for any detected or suspected abnormality, even as minor as a cleft palate. This Bill sends the message that certain types of people are disposable

It is a national reproach that abortion is by far the leading cause of death in Australia. The estimated 100,000 abortions in Australia each year exceeds the combined total of the top five official causes of death in Australia. The estimated four million abortions in Australia since the 1970s has wiped out a third of our younger generations. Because we believe abortion is a crime against the personhood of unborn babies and our own humanity we ask you to recommend against this Bill.

Because we believe abortion is **“the intentional taking of innocent human life”**, we see abortion as a crime against the **personhood** of unborn babies. We therefore call for justice for the unborn as innocent, voiceless and vulnerable **persons** who should be protected by our laws. The Canberra Declaration says that **“to do anything less is to weaken our humanity and to despise our personhood”**.

Please recommend ways to make Queensland a state that affirms the right to life of every unborn child from the moment of conception.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

David Rowsome

for the Canberra Declaration Team & Community

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