




Speech By  
**Bruce Saunders**

**MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2021

### **VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL**

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (8.44 pm): I rise to support the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021. As we know, the Palaszczuk government went to the 2020 election with a commitment to introduce voluntary assisted dying laws in this term of government. During the 2020 election I consulted widely on this issue. I can honestly say that there was overwhelming support for this in the Maryborough electorate. Since the election and the return of the Palaszczuk government, I have been consulting and working with my community on this. I can honestly say that about 82 per cent of people consulted—and we consulted a fair swag of people in the electorate—support this legislation.

It is a hard decision for all members of parliament to make whether they will vote for this legislation or not. It will probably be one of the hardest pieces of legislation we will have to pass in our political careers. I believe this is the right legislation and that this is the right thing to do for the people of Queensland. People are entitled to make their own choice. It is not up to us to tell people what they can do and what they cannot do when it comes to voluntary assist dying. That is up to them. That is what this legislation provides for. This gives people the right to make that decision. It hands the power to people to make that decision.

The bill will ensure that the process is accessed only by persons who are assessed to be eligible and protect vulnerable persons from coercion and exploitation. We have been through that. I have read the report. The bill will provide legal protection for health practitioners, whether they choose to participate or not, and establish the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board and other mechanisms to ensure compliance with the act.

I put on the public record my support for the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Health, the Attorney-General and a very good friend of mine in the House, the member for Thuringowa. He has gone through this process for the last three years. We have become very good mates since 2015. On behalf of my electorate, I would like to say thank you for the hard work you have done. I know it has taken a toll on him personally. He has gone through it. He has listened to every person. I know people from my electorate have contacted him and he has been very courteous and spoken to those people. On behalf of the people of Maryborough, I say thank you very much to the member for Thuringowa.

We have all lost people. I have lost my parents to cancer. I have lost my father-in-law. One of the things that came back to me was what happened to a good mate of mine. We went to school together. He got crook. He was a big man and a pretty tough bloke. It got to the stage where I did not go and visit him because every time I walked into his room in the hospital he would say, 'Popeye, put that pillow over my head, mate. Come on brother, you can do it.' It is pretty hard to go into a room and see this every day. I said to him one day, 'If you had your choice, what would you do?' He said, 'If I could get hold of a gun, it would be all over in 10 seconds.' That is what this bill will stop.

To see a man who has gone from 134 kilograms down to, wringing wet, 35 or 37 kilograms is quite daunting, especially when I grew up with him and had known him all my life. I played Rugby League with him. We had gone swimming in the river together. We had gone out with girlfriends on double dates as young men. To watch that happen is confronting.

That is why I think this is bill is so important to a lot of people. We hear stories coming through our offices. We do not like to discuss personal things. People come in and have meetings with us and we see the hurt and tears in their eyes as they speak of watching their fathers, mothers, sons, daughters die in excruciating pain. I have talked to people in the health system who have come through my office over the last three years that we have been talking about the voluntary assisted dying bill. They have told me some horrific stories.

I was at the Howard markets the other Saturday and I had a bloke come up to me. He did not agree with voluntary assisted dying. He believed that while ever there was breath there was hope. He is entitled to that view. I did say to him that it is voluntary. It is not mandatory. This legislation gives people the choice to make the decision that is best for them and their families. This is what it is about.

It is good legislation. It is legislation from a progressive government that is putting people first at all times and making sure that people's voices are heard in this state. That is what this legislation does, and that is what the chair of the committee has been doing. The chair and all members of the committee have travelled and have consulted with people not only in the cities but in regional Queensland and everywhere. Everyone has had a voice to put their views forward to the committee.

It is a conscience vote. I will be voting for the bill. I thoroughly believe in it. I think this is good legislation. I absolutely commend the bill to the House.