




Speech By  
**Hon. Cameron Dick**

**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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### **VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Investment) (7.35 pm): I rise to contribute to this important debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. At the outset I wish to make it clear that I intend to support the bill at all stages of 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.

Having followed the public debate in this country on euthanasia for many years, the reflections of many Australians whom I greatly admire weigh heavily on me—Australians like our former Labor prime minister Paul Keating. Paul Keating observed, when commenting on the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill in 2017, that it constituted, in his view—

... an unacceptable departure in our approach to human existence and the irrevocable sanctity that should govern our understanding of what it means to be human.

Paul Keating went on to say—

Opposition to this bill is not about religion. It is about the civilisational ethic that should be at the heart of our secular society. The concerns I express are shared by people of any religion or no religion. In public life it is the principles that matter. They define the norms and values of a society and in this case the principles concern our view of human life itself. It is a mistake for legislators to act on the deeply held emotional concerns of many when that involves crossing a threshold that will affect the entire society in perpetuity.

Labor Senator Pat Dodson is another Australian I deeply admire. Speaking as a Yawuru man and a senator for Western Australia in opposing the Restoring Territory Rights (Assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill in 2015, Senator Dodson spoke of a concept of human interconnectedness that transcends across many First Nations groups. Senator Dodson said—

It is grounded in our understanding that human resilience is based on our relationships with each other and our connectedness with the world around us. The quality of life for individuals and for our communities are intertwined, not limited to the wellbeing of an individual. We are fundamentally responsible for honouring our fellow human beings. We are called to carry responsibilities, to exercise duties and to honour those who are in need, who are ill, who are elderly, who are dependent and those of the next generation to value life with love, respect and responsibility. This is true of family members and unknown individuals. Moving away from such principles and values begins to reshape the value of human beings and our civil society, in my view.

Senator Dodson continued—

We exist not as solitary individuals; we exist within a family, a community, our cultures and ethos, and in the kinship landscape.

Through the process leading up to and including this debate, each of us in this House has examined our own conscience, our own individual experiences, the stories and experiences of others, our own experience with death, our interconnectedness as described by Senator Dodson, and our common humanity.

The bill articulates strict legislative criteria for a voluntary assisted dying scheme in Queensland. In short, the eligibility criteria require that an adult Queenslanders, resident in this state, must have an advanced and progressive disease, illness or medical condition that will cause death within 12 months and is causing that person suffering that the person considers to be intolerable. In my view, these criteria are at the outer limits of what the law and our society should permit. I regard free and informed consent and decision-making capacity by adults as immutable parts of the scheme as proposed.

As the Queensland Law Reform Commission has noted, the scheme requires that a person must understand the nature and effect of decisions about voluntary assisted dying, be capable of freely and voluntarily deciding to access the scheme and be able to communicate that decision. I believe the proposed legislative framework, including the strict eligibility criteria, is at its maximum possible limit.

Accordingly, for as long as I have the honour and the privilege of serving as a member of the Legislative Assembly in this, the 57th Parliament, or beyond I will not support any changes to these essential criteria and the scope of the scheme. In particular, I am implacably opposed to the expansion of the scheme to children, being people aged under 18 years, and the application of the scheme to any other classes of individuals, for example, people with a psychiatric or mental illness, dementia or similar conditions. This has happened in other parts of the world, most recently in Canada, a society and a liberal democracy not unlike our own.

While I acknowledge our different legal and constitutional histories, in particular in the Canadian context, the application of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a voluntary assisted dying scheme that began under a framework not dissimilar to the framework currently under consideration by the House, has now expanded to include individuals whose death is not defined as reasonably foreseeable. This means that individuals do not need to have a fatal or terminal condition to be eligible for what is known in Canada as medical assistance in dying. The Canadian scheme now includes patients with mental or psychiatric illnesses, although those provisions will not become operative, as I understand it, for two years to allow for protocols and safeguards to be established and reviewed.

In addition, the new law passed by the Canadian parliament earlier this year also allows people to make advance requests if they fear losing the ability to make a decision about medical assistance in dying. All of this has happened within five years of the initial scheme commencing. While I fully support this bill as drafted, I am and remain opposed to the expansion of the Queensland scheme other than as proposed to be established by this bill.

Can I conclude by saying this: All human life is valuable and all human life is to be valued. The sick, the vulnerable, the chronically ill and, most importantly, the dying should never believe, nor should they be led to believe, that they are a burden or that our world would be better off without them. My fervent hope is that this proposed law will never be seen or used by anyone to validate those sentiments.

Whatever happens to this bill, the message we send to Queenslanders through our institutions and through our culture must always be that no-one's life is ever a burden. In a nation where suicide is the leading cause of death for people aged between 15 and 44 years, 75 per cent of whom are boys and men, this message can never be emphasised enough. Whether you are terminally ill, whether you are old, whether you are very depressed, you should know that your life is a life worth living and that it is not a burden to any of us or to all of us. Your life is worthy and meaningful and valued. I believe this to be the truth, a spiritual and a secular truth, a truth that has rightly been reinforced throughout history and across all religions and by all societies and cultures. It is a truth that is immutable and it is a truth that we must always remember.