




Speech By  
**Hon. Glenn Butcher**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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**VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL**

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water) (6.56 pm): I rise tonight to make a short contribution to the debate of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill before the House. I, too, have heard of the personal experiences of people hopelessly watching from the sidelines as people they love and care for bravely battle day after day through terminal illness. I have heard of people in hospital rooms where the only comfort family and friends can offer are quiet words and a gentle touch. I have heard of the pain on the faces of those looking on as the patient begs for an end to the suffering. I have heard of the futility when, despite the best medical science available and the best palliative care from our health professionals in attendance, there is no respite from pain for some of these people. There are some terminal diseases where the pain simply cannot be controlled.

Like thousands of other Queenslanders each year, I have been left to wish there was something more that could be done. I wish there was another choice that was available to stop the pain and the suffering. I wish that the loved ones who have graced our lives with their light could have the choice to end their suffering on their own terms and in peace and with dignity. Today, through my support of this bill, I get that chance to offer that choice. What I recount is not unique, and many more members will recall similar sad experiences over the course of this debate.

I have also heard countless stories from the people of Gladstone over the past year, some from very close personal friends of mine and others from those I just met in passing. The small details are different, but the anguish from those people is still the same. Sadly, new stories are unfolding in hospital rooms and in palliative care facilities right across the state as I stand here tonight. In those rooms, more wishes are being made. I offer my support for this bill to provide hope for those Queenslanders, many through no fault of their own, whose only options are ongoing pain and ongoing suffering.

To provide a choice for those who can no longer endure the seemingly endless days spent waiting for the inevitable is what we must offer and to put the control back into their hands—giving them the opportunity to die with dignity. That is the essence of this bill tonight—choice. Those who do not wish to access the option of voluntary assisted dying will be cared for and respected for that decision. Conversely, the same must be afforded to those who want to exercise the option. It is simply another choice—a choice for many Queenslanders who have run out of other options.

No-one in this House or anywhere that I have talked to is suggesting that this is the only choice, and the checks and balances in this bill certainly make that clear. The continued investment by our government in palliative care across the state remains a solid commitment. Our healthcare professionals will continue to offer every option of care that is available to sustain life and certainly to assist a comfortable, prolonged time on this earth.

What this bill is seeking to do is to simply provide one more choice. I cannot imagine being in the terrible position of being terminally ill. I am sure many in this House are in the same position. I cannot imagine how hard it is to tell your family and your friends. I cannot imagine being in so much pain that you cannot even eat or speak or even sit up in bed. I certainly cannot imagine knowing you will die from

a terminal illness in the next week, the next month or the next year, with the only other certainty being that you will suffer, despite the incredible and dedicated palliative care services that are available. This is a tragic story for so many Queenslanders and so many families. This is why this legislation is so important because it means this does not have to be your story if that is what you choose. If something ever happened to me where I was in this unimaginable position I would want that choice for myself and for my family.

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.

I have a close friend who, at this moment, is out of her hometown waiting on pathology results following major cancer surgery last week. She says the importance of this bill has multiplied tenfold since her diagnosis recently. She now faces a new understanding of the reality of her diagnosis and of the unknown. All that she asks for is the right to make a choice should she need to.

What this bill is seeking to do is, once again, simply provide that one more choice. I commend those who stand up to relate end-of-life stories of loved ones and over the course of this debate, no matter which side of the debate they fall, this is not an easy subject to discuss. These are difficult conversations, but they are necessary ones. I will always be proud to have supported this bill.

I also take this opportunity to thank the committee and my good mate Aaron Harper. I know that his support of this bill and his life has certainly been a bit of a whirlwind over the 18 months since he has been going through this process with his committee. I pay tribute to him for doing that.

Once again, I will be very proud to support this bill. I commend the bill to the House.