




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (2.38 pm): I rise to support the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. This is an historic moment. We went to the 2020 election with a commitment to introduce the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill during this term of government. This has been after extensive consultation. No-one can say that three years is a short time. There were thousands of submissions, thousands of discussions and two parliamentary inquiries chaired eminently by the member for Thuringowa and attended by the rest of the parliamentary committee in this House. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for the work they have done. They did an exceptional job. I know that the member for Thuringowa and all of those committee members are very proud of the work they did. After all of that, I am very happy that we could actually debate this bill this week. I did not respect the position where some members attempted to put this bill aside so that we did not have this debate. Too many people in my electorate have been waiting for this bill to be debated.

I want to now turn to thanking my electorate. It is often quoted that 80 per cent of people would support voluntary assisted dying laws, and I think my electorate is well and truly above the 80 per cent mark. It is a very progressive electorate. I remember in the marriage equality debate I think we had the highest return of a yes vote in Australia. I am truly representing an electorate that is very much in support. However, there are some people who are not. I have reached out to my electorate and I want to thank those who came to my office to speak to me on both sides of the fence. Many more were in support than the very few who were opposed. I want to respect all the views in my electorate.

I came out very early in support of the bill, like the member for Bulimba and the member for Nudgee, two very good friends of mine. I welcomed and respected their input and I thank them. Having looked at the Law Reform Commission report, the reports from the Health and Environment Committee and the discussions we had openly with each other, I saw that the bill provided what I needed to be able to vote for it. Let me touch on a few of those things.

The object of the bill is about options and choice. This is not mandatory. This is about options and choice for people who have to make a significant decision. There is a lawful process. I believe there are adequate safeguards, there are legal protections and there will be a Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board established as policy objectives in the legislation. I believe the safeguards are there in the bill, and I think the Law Reform Commission report and the two reports of the parliamentary committee went through that extensively. To tinker with their reasoning after the way they looked at all the arguments for and against, the argument that they made—if honourable members read that report they will find it is comprehensive. I will not support amendments that tinker with that reasoning and the manner in which they landed on the legislation and the bill before the House.

There are unintended consequences in the proposed amendments. They have not been tested in the public domain. I have not had the opportunity to talk to my constituents about them. I will not be supporting those amendments. I do not believe it is right that, after the full debate on those amendments

and how the public and all those thousands of people submitted and put their views on the current legislation, we now say we are going to change it in this way without those thousands of people having an ability to say something about that. I think that is wrong and I will not be supporting the amendments.

When it comes to safeguards, the bill contains strict eligibility criteria. It protects vulnerable persons from coercion and exploitation. It provides legal protection whether people choose to participate or not. There are legal protections for both sides. As I said, there is a review board that will be looking at this closely.

The big issue that keeps coming through in this House is palliative care. I cannot even count the number of times the parliamentary committee reports and the Law Reform Commission report mentions the need for palliative care. It is embedded right throughout the report. They say it is a very important part of the bill and of the legislation going forward. However, I do agree with the report from the Health and Environment Committee that palliative care cannot resolve all suffering. I witnessed members of my family who were gasping and moaning the whole time they lay in their bed to the point where family members were begging the nurses to give them more morphine because we could not stand the moaning while they were laying in their deathbed. That is called palliative sedation.

At the end of the day they were completely out. This was experienced by my brother-in-law, my mother and the one I regret the most was my dad. He died on Anzac Day. I had been out doing my Anzac stuff. My sisters had the first shift. He had a really bad night and he was in a lot of pain that day. He had prostate cancer and it went through his body. He was very, very sick. I had not been there that morning to see him. I took the afternoon shift; I took work. He had a very bad night and when I arrived he was sleeping peacefully. What we did not know is that he had been palliatively sedated. My other two sisters arrived at about five o'clock in the afternoon. He moved a bit and he was groaning. When they arrived we were talking about waking him up for him to be fed. We watched him and at 20 past five he just stopped breathing and we had not had the chance to say what we wanted to say that morning before he was palliatively sedated.

It is not the answer for everything. I do not know whether my mum and dad would ever have chosen voluntary assisted dying. I do not know. I always take the words of Penny Tovey, the wife of Peter Simpson, the former secretary of the Electrical Trades Union. She is quoted in the report. She said—

'Dying is hard enough, don't make it any harder'. That was certainly true of Peter's experience. Please keep this sentiment in mind as you consider this bill.

Penny, can I say I will and I have.

They were very hard times. I have seen this. People make choices about their health every day, whether they take cancer treatment or not. My aunt in Sicily had a lump on her breast. When I went and saw her in Sicily years ago my Aunty Paola said to me, 'I will never get the operation to remove that lump from my breast.' She died of breast cancer, but that was a choice and we make choices every day. People make advance care directives not to be revived. We make these choices every day which can all result in death, whether we speed it up or prolong it. These choices are what human beings make every single day. To say that we do not is incorrect because we do.

I hope that when this bill becomes legislation my family and I never have to use it. I hope we never have to use voluntary assisted dying, but let me tell honourable members I will fight for their right to have the option and the choice to do so should they face death in the future and want to use this legislation. I am hoping they never do.

I want to pay tribute to Duncan Pegg. I saw him during his last few days along with the member for Nudgee. Duncan once again asked that we support voluntary assisted dying for him. He was weak; he was withering away. I had never seen anyone so jaundiced. I know that he was very keen for us to do this.

I believe that the protections in the voluntary assisted dying laws ensure that there will not be one more extra death but there will be a lot less suffering. That is what we want to achieve by the passing of this legislation. This one is for Duncan. This one is for the memory of my family and what they went through. I want to thank the Premier and the Deputy Premier. Is it not a mighty Labor Party that gives a true conscience vote free from any interference, free from anything but the respect we have for one another?

I thank all my ministerial colleagues and my caucus colleagues, particularly the member for Nudgee and the member for Bulimba, who helped me through a lot of this. It is truly a strength that we can come together and respect each other's view as we have done in this House. I thank everyone for the respectful nature of this debate. I can understand why people struggle with it. It is a difficult topic. But at the same time, I think that giving people that option and choice in some of the darkest days of their life is something that I will not deny them. I commend the bill to the House.