




Speech By  
**Jarrold Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 September 2021

### **VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL**

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.10 pm): I will be frank: at times I have struggled to see a pathway through this. I have spoken to many people in my electorate, some with passionate views in support of this legislation and some with passionate views against it. I have listened to these people. I have read their emails. I have sat down with anyone who has requested a meeting. Last Friday in Kawana I had coffee with a lady I have a lot of time for. I recalled a conversation we had five years ago about voluntary assisted dying and an experience she had with her mother. Noting that this bill was going to be debated this week I rang her and I asked her for a catch-up.

Even before the last election, my concerns with a voluntary assisted dying scheme have always been on the record. My electorate would know that. I have been a member there for 12 years. I have struggled with this bill and the debate. One cannot help but be moved by the personal stories. I think all honourable members who have participated in this debate would say that those stories do have a profound impact on you not only as a local member but also as a human. We are all human. We all experience things differently. We have heard in the last 15 hours of debate many personal stories, not only from the experiences of members but also from the experiences of their constituents. I am no different. I have the same stories from my own constituents and my own family.

My natural inclination, as someone who believes in the value of the freedoms of the individual, leads me to a sympathetic view in support of a voluntary assisted dying scheme so far as it relates to the choice of an individual. I am troubled though by the great variety of circumstances of human life. There are many good intentions in this bill and good people who support the bill.

As I said, last Friday I sat down with a lady I have a lot of time for. For about an hour and a half we talked about the bill and the concerns I have and her experiences. Before the last election a lady emailed me and wanted to know my position on voluntary assisted dying; despite the fact that at that stage we had not had a bill but an election promise by the government. I gave her a call and said, 'Let's meet.' Her family had a terrible experience with her father who had motor neurone disease. I struggled to see a perfectly healthy lady in a lounge room with her husband having coffee with me and her talking about her experiences with her father. She did not have motor neurone disease, but she was afraid she would get it as her father did and her quality of life would decline. She is obviously supportive of a scheme.

Going into the last election good supporters of mine asked me for my views and when expressing the concerns I have had for many years about a voluntary assisted dying scheme they said they would not vote for me. They say that there are two certainties in life: death and taxes. There is a third and I think all honourable members will experience this when we vote tomorrow. The third is knowing with a heavy heart that no matter how I choose to vote on this bill I am not going to please everyone. Indeed, some may be upset and angry at me. Some will be satisfied. I wish I could please everyone on this issue, but I cannot. All I can do is explain my reasoning as best I can in the short period we have and hope that my constituents, no matter how they feel on this subject, know that I have considered their views and it has been an incredibly difficult decision to make.

When we look at the elements of the bill and the explanation through the committee report we see the process of signing up to a voluntary assisted dying scheme. It says in the bill the person first makes a request that they want to access the voluntary assisted dying scheme. They go and see a doctor for a first request and the doctor does an assessment. If the first doctor finds the person eligible they refer it for a second independent assessment. Then the second doctor does an assessment. If the second doctor finds the person eligible they may make the second request to the first doctor. The person may make the final request to the doctor and then a person who wants to participate in voluntary assisted dying can either take the option of self-administration or practitioner administration.

That is, in essence, how the scheme works. I have some concerns with that, particularly the self-administration. I cannot fathom a situation where you would have an individual who would be eligible with a terminal illness with less than 12 months to live prescribed the medication—poison—to end their life and they can self-administer it. On my initial reading of that my concern was, 'Can this person do it at home?' Yes, they can. The bill says that it has to be in a locked storage container, but what happens when it leaves the pharmacy? There is no guarantee it is going to make it home. There is no guarantee that when it gets home the individual puts it on the kitchen bench under a lock and key. There are varieties of locks and keys. I cannot help but think about a situation where someone else visits the household—a kid—they find the key, they unlock this box and they drink it and die. The person who signed up for voluntary assisted dying had no intention for that to happen, but it could be a consequence.

There is nothing to say that the person needs anyone else with them. We could have people signing up to the scheme dying at home, vulnerable Queenslanders, on their own, without anyone. I am told by doctors in other jurisdictions that sometimes it does not work. Can you imagine an 80-year-old lady or man has the drink and it does not work, and two days later family members find them, call an ambulance and the ambulance has no option but to resuscitate them? That situation has occurred in some jurisdictions. I am concerned about the vulnerable in our community. I am concerned about the self-administering process.

I am concerned about conscientious objections from organisations and institutions. The bill is about choice. Where is the choice for those organisations? Many of them are faith based organisations. Everything they do is based on their faith. If we are talking about choice, let it be a free choice.

I am concerned about vulnerable and elderly Queenslanders being taken advantage of. As a former attorney-general and solicitor I can tell the House that in Queensland elder abuse is real. Regrettably, human conditions include good and bad. There are many possibilities for this legislation to be abused. We have all heard circumstances. When people talked to me about supporting this bill I would give them the example of my nanna who went through a process of dementia and stroke, passing away a few years ago. Many of those people thought this bill would apply to people with dementia and Alzheimer's. It does not. People have been given false hope that this bill will be their dying with dignity ticket. It is not because it is restricted.

Palliative care needs more work, more resources and more funding. It is a failure of governments over successive years not to fund palliative care properly. The honourable member for Toowoomba South is moving amendments which I absolutely support, including eligibility from 12 months to six months, having psychological and psychiatric assessment, a specialist palliative care consultation and allowing conscientious objections from doctors.

My mum had cancer. We could have lost her but, God willing, she is with us today. She is in remission. She had melanoma. If she had been diagnosed as having 12 months to live and, as her son, I tried to convince her not to pursue voluntary assisted dying, under this legislation that would be an offence. To try to convince a family member not to pursue voluntary assisted dying would be an offence.

As I have said, I would dearly love to support this bill today for freedom of choice for individuals. However, I am not voting on feelings, emotions or what people think is in this bill. I am voting on what is in the bill. If the Premier had in a bipartisan way worked on amendments, as was advised in the media, it is likely that I would be voting for the bill with all of those amendments. Alas that did not happen. My concerns remain and I am not yet convinced that the safeguards in the bill are satisfactory to protect vulnerable Queenslanders—safeguards for the vulnerable and safeguards for the health professionals. As I have said, I have real concerns about this bill.

I thank my constituents who have put forward their views to me, both for and against the bill. As I said, it is a very passionate debate for a lot of people. All I ask is that people consider what I have said about my concerns. I will be supporting the amendments and I hope all honourable members support them, because that may change things. If the amendments get up it may change the way I vote on the bill. However, at the moment, in good conscience and with my concerns for vulnerable Queenslanders, I cannot support the bill in its current form.