




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2021

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (7.14 pm): We have heard some compelling speeches here already today. I am not going to repeat the arguments for or against the bill in my speech. Rather I would like to explain why I have reached the decision I have. I want to explain to those watching that this is a complicated issue. I want to assure those watching that every member here has read every bit of information they have been sent and we have listened to everybody who wanted to have some input, just as I have.

This bill is not perfect and hopefully some of the amendments being put forward will improve it. I will listen carefully to those amendments, and when they are put I will support some and I will not support others. Ultimately, I will support this bill because ultimately I believe in choice. I hope those people watching and those in the gallery appreciate that the members here are fully educated on this issue and there will be some very good reasons why they have chosen to vote the way they have.

There is no doubt in my mind that most people support the concept of choice in the way you die, but it is very hard to legislate that concept. There are some issues with this bill, as outlined very succinctly by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Clayfield and the member for Southport. There is no better way to explain how I feel than going back over nine years to my maiden speech on 29 May 2012. I commend that speech to members if they want to know who I am. In part, I said—

I place on the record my overriding philosophies of life. The opinions and decisions I make in this place will reflect those philosophies. I believe in the right of people to make their own choices in life. Regardless of whether or not I agree with them, they have the right to their own opinion and their own choices.

Following the tabling of the VAD legislation, I have undertaken extensive community engagement to ascertain what views my electorate holds. This engagement included local listening booths, a survey mail-out to all households and an online survey seeking personal views. Seventy-two per cent of those who contacted my office or participated in my survey are in favour of voluntary assisted dying. Mind you, I think they mainly support the concept of voluntary assisted dying.

I would like to quote some of the feedback I received from my electorate. Kerry from Varsity Lakes wrote to me to share the following—

I have always believed in a person's right to die when health problems make life difficult.

My closest friend is dying from Multiple Sclerosis. It was diagnosed in 1991.

She has been in an aged care facility since 2013, dying by inches.

Her brain remains active, and she can speak in a whisper. Her limbs and organs are paralysed. It is a living death.

Angelo from Varsity Lakes told me—

My sister recently passed away from cancer in hospital. The final week of her life was horrible, both for her and the family. She was terminally ill, but she put up a mighty fight to the end. For the last three days she was conscious, her mind was lucid and she was terrified.

When she was no longer responding to treatment, the hospital was merciful and attempted to hasten her end by withholding food, water and antibiotics. Medication was administered to prevent pain or physical discomfort. It was heartbreaking to watch her struggle for water only to be refused.

The process of dying was psychological torture. The memory of those horrible final days will remain with those of us still living, for a long time to come.

We as a society treat our pets and injured wild animals better than we do our fellow human beings in the final days of their lives. We can do much better and we should.

I and my family support changes to the current legislation; that terminally ill people be afforded the opportunity to choose an end to their struggle with grace and dignity, either by themselves or with assistance.

Julie, a registered nurse from Varsity Lakes, said—

Voluntary Assisted Dying is a personal choice to exercise control about how and when you pass away when quality of life is incredibly poor.

Palliative care can help with some symptoms control but isn't the answer to everything.

A person should be able to make their own decisions and be supported with their choices. My opinion is based on decades of clinical experience with end stage chronic disease and aged care, working in collaboration with specialist palliative care services.

On the other side Rodney, who works in palliative care, wrote to me saying—

I would like you to vote against the voluntary assisted dying bill on behalf of myself and my family.

I work in Palliative Care and across multiple hospital wards and understand the pain of death however in weighing up the pros and cons I believe voluntary assisted dying will cause more harm than good. The risk of placing the power to end life (as opposed to the power not to save life) on a clinician is too much to bear and errors in judgement will take place that affect Drs, health care workers, patients and family that cannot be corrected. Investment in good quality healthcare (especially palliative care, finishing life well) and promotion of the value of life and living is the answer, not assisting people to die.

At a minimum please vote for a change to the bill to allow clinicians and organisations the freedom to not be forced to assist someone to die (which goes against all our ethical standards to date).

I hope the amendments fix that up. Jonathan, a 19-year-old from Burleigh Waters, wrote to me saying—

Palliative care should be funded properly so that people really do have an option.

I'm also really uncomfortable sanctioning and assisting the death of Queenslanders.

I think it signals that we don't think their life is worth living once they reach a certain stage of their disease.

It's such a difficult topic. Maybe we should just fund palliative care properly and come back to this in a few years? Given this really is a matter of life and death—I think we ought to tread very carefully before we set this precedent here.

Six years ago on Sunday my father passed away from cancer. He was in pain. The nurses were great in what they did to assist him. I would have done anything to stop the pain he was in, but I could not. Ultimately, I believe in the right of people to make their own choices in life and now, I guess, in death. I checked with my electorate and they agree with me. I will support this bill, hopefully with some amendments.