




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (8.50 pm): I rise to speak on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill to place on the public record the reasons why I will vote according to my own conscience on this bill. Firstly, the flowery empathetic nomenclature of the bill is a political soft landing for the proponents of this bill, which should really be called the 'State Approval for Suicide Bill'. That is the reality that we are determining in the House this week. The bill would not be in the House unless the Palaszczuk Labor government were absolutely confident that the bill was going to pass. With the dominant numbers in the House they have, this bill will pass.

Suicide comes from the Latin word 'suicidium' and has been around since time immemorial. Sometimes throughout history it has been viewed as a despicable act, punishable by degrading acts to its utilisers and their associates, and sometimes it has been viewed as an honourable act to be celebrated as a brave sacrifice to historical glory. Our modern world has deemed suicide as a disease of the mind, encapsulating frailty, depression, loneliness, escapism and other undesirable symptoms, and we have gone to great lengths as a society to address, heal and avert suicide as a solution to an individual's problems on the premise that those mind shortcomings can be made better in the future.

The bill definitively makes suicide an option for those members of our society who are facing near certain death by disease, with the state's approval to dignify the act. How Raymond Alexander Stevens votes on the bill has been a very difficult choice for me. Additionally, there are matters in the bill about which I am most concerned with and which I am hopeful will be addressed by amendments to the bill at a later stage of the debate.

The compelling of any institution or person philosophically opposed to assisting the curtailing of life of an individual is against my sense of justice and fairness which I do not support. However, I do support the main thrust of the bill, and that is to enable the state to approve the use of suicide by a patient with a terminal illness who cannot, for reasons known only to themselves, bear the proposition that they might endure a painful and lingering death as the final chapter of their life on earth.

The patient must be of sound mind, as evidenced by independent clinical definition. The patient must have a clinical disease that most probably will end their life within 12 months. The patient must be free from any coercive pressure to take this life-ending decision and the patient must involve themselves with a very bureaucratic and protective process to achieve their desired outcome.

I have come to my decision from several aspects carefully canvassed and I have absorbed both sides of the for-and-against argument on a bill that I sincerely believe is part of society's completely changing attitudes to life, death and religion. When I was a university student, the average age that men lived to was 63 and that, I am told, was why the retirement age for workers was 55. With medical intervention and better lifestyle habits, the average age of living for men has extended to 80—and I hope to make it—and religion has nothing to do with that extension. In fact, in Roman times, the average life expectancy was 33 but, to be fair, they did have quite a few more battles than we have today that may have lowered the batting average.

As we get older, we are more susceptible to disease, as is the case with most animals in the animal kingdom of which Homo sapiens are just one. One of the reasons I am voting for this bill is that a very dear friend of mine contracted motor neurone disease and died a very undignified, excruciatingly painful and 'horribly painful drain on family emotions' death.

I have canvassed my LNP Mermaid Beach SEC and branch members, and they have overwhelmingly requested I vote for this bill. These are the folk who put their trust in me through the preselection process to deliver in parliament good representation and to listen to their voices.

Finally, but not inconsequentially, I have asked myself what I would want if I were diagnosed with an incurable disease that would end my life painfully and uncomfortably with much suffering and burdening my family over the last few months of my life. My answer to myself was quite simple and refreshingly easy. I have had a great life, a wonderful wife and kids over 45 years, beautiful grandkids—four thereof—great friends and a million memories. If God ordains that my life and my time on earth is up, I would set a date, say goodbye to all my family and friends, put in place all provisions for my family's life after my departure and have the best last party that anyone could have and tell everyone to 'party like there's no tomorrow'!

While I do respect and understand the many objectors to this bill being passed, it is my firm belief that we are taking another step, through this legislation, into another society that, who knows, may even bring back state condoned capital punishment for people like Martin Bryant and the like in the future. Many have said that this legislation is the 'foot on the sticky paper' and possibly it could be, but that will be a matter for other members of parliament to deal with in the years to come as society continues on its changing ways. The society I live in today is different to the one I grew up in. Some of it is good; some of it is bad. There is no doubt that society will be different in 20 years time to the one I am in today. This legislation is but one small step in changing the way society lives and, in this case, dies.