



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr KING** (Kurwongbah—ALP) (8.58 pm): I rise this evening to contribute to this debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021. It is a very passionate debate and there have been many points put forward. I have listened to them all. I have attended forums for and against this legislation. I have consulted within my community, where I discovered an overwhelming majority of support for allowing choice at end of life. In public polling conducted in Kurwongbah, those who strongly support this legislation outnumber those who are against by nearly 10 to one.

In making my decision on which way to vote on this legislation, I weighed up many aspects. The first was the evidence that my community wanted it. We are elected to represent our communities, so it is great to know they wanted me to support it. Secondly, I considered whether it was good legislation, and I am confident the Queensland Law Reform Commission has delivered and made sure this legislation is legally sound. This included ticking off on concerns around coercion and making sure terminally ill patients have the time and opportunity to make their own choice.

My final consideration was my personal views, and they have never been in doubt. I have lost quite a few loved ones over the years—mostly to cancer—starting with my mum, who died when I was 12 years old after a seven-year increasingly painful battle, both of my mothers-in-law in the past two years—the reason I have two is probably a story for another day—and recently one of my best mates, Peter Simpson, ‘Simmo’. It is Simmo’s journey that was most painful. He certainly was an advocate for voluntary assisted dying. The agony that he was in at the end when he called me to say goodbye, with cancer splitting his sternum in half and lumps of cancer all through his body and head, was incredible. He and his amazing wife and carer, Penny, documented the journey. It is a real shame that at the end he could not access the choice that I hope becomes law this week.

There has been a push for more palliative care and an argument that this is the answer rather than voluntary assisted dying. I see them both as complementary. I acknowledge that my mother-in-law’s palliative care at the Prince Charles Hospital was nothing short of amazing. It allowed me to get to know a person whom I had never been close to. It was healing and a very important time, but in the last week or two of extreme pain, constant care and drugs she had many lucid moments when she said, ‘I just want it to be over. I hope it comes soon.’ If she could have had the option to have us all there while she slipped away and left the pain behind, I know she would have.

These are my personal accounts. I have also heard the stories of those during the information sessions I have attended—stories of people who have no skin left due to viruses and disease; organs dissolving and failing on them. Those people deserve the option to pass with their dignity intact. The book Andrew Denton launched titled *The Damage Done* by Go Gently has many harrowing testimonies of family and friends as well as the dying themselves. The trauma and suffering detailed in these accounts is staggering. I ask: who would not want to allow these people, who are terminally ill, the ability to choose when they go?

I would like to thank the Premier for introducing this important legislation, the Health and Environment Committee and the former committee for their hard work—and emotionally draining work—on this legislation. I would like to give special mention to the chair, my friend Aaron Harper, who has carried this around with him for a long time. He is a passionate advocate for getting it done properly. I would like to thank the Queensland Law Reform Commission for their work on this, strong advocates along the way like Andrew Denton and Everaldo Compton who have always taken the time to provide advice during this journey, and my dear friends Penny Tovey and Simmo for letting me share their journey.

In researching my decision on this legislation I came across a debating technique called the Gish gallop, which has been used extensively during the lead-up to this debate by some parties. I have seen a bit of it in the House. The Gish gallop focuses on overwhelming a debate with as many arguments as possible without regard for accuracy or strength of argument; in other words, quantity over quality. This technique is often used to create doubt in the hope that even a supporter may think, 'While I support this topic, this may not be the right time' or 'This isn't the right bill to get this done.'

I urge everyone watching this debate to imagine—or those with personal experience to remember—looking into the eyes of a loved one who just wants to end the suffering. Imagine they have ticked all the legal boxes that are proposed and then imagine telling them, 'I'm sorry, now isn't the time' or 'I'm sorry, we need to rewrite this bill.' I will not be saying sorry because I think now is the right time and this bill will get it right. Together let's give terminally ill patients a choice at the end: a choice to die with dignity if the alternative is worse. I will finish by saying something Penny Tovey and others have said because I think it sums it up really well. She said, 'This legislation will not cause one extra death; it will, however, cause a lot less suffering at the end of life.' I will be supporting this legislation and I commend the bill to the House.