




Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (8.35 pm): I rise to speak on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. In my opinion, this is the most important piece of legislation that I will ever debate as a state parliamentarian. I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for granting the members of the LNP a true conscience vote on this matter. I will state from the outset that my conscience will not allow me to support this bill. My allocated 10 minutes is not enough time to fully elaborate on the reasons for my opposition, so I will limit my argument to four main points.

Firstly, I believe this bill goes against the single value that every civilisation has held as the highest since the beginning of time—no matter what religion, or no religion, that they follow—that is, the sanctity of life. Preserving life, enhancing life and protecting life is the primary objective of all civilised societies, and they spend billions of dollars to achieve these outcomes. We build hospitals to heal, we fund medical research to fight disease and illness, we have police forces and fire brigades to protect and rescue, we have paramedics to save lives, and we send a fleet of naval ships to rescue a lone yachtsman at sea. Why? Because human life is precious and sacrosanct. This is not a religious issue; it is a humanity issue. Our value of life is what distinguishes us from every other species on the planet.

I hold grave fears that the introduction of these laws will erode this foundational tenet of society. It will smash a barrier that has existed for eons and have unintended consequences. Those consequences probably will not be seen in a year's time or even 10, but in future generations. I am concerned it will lead to diminution of the value of life. Pass these laws and you have crossed the Rubicon; there is no turning back.

Ordinarily I am a strong believer in the LNP principles of the freedom of the individual to make choices about their lives. However, those freedoms, those rights should be foregone if it has the potential to harm others. This moves me to my second point. I oppose the bill as I am concerned about our most vulnerable, particularly the elderly. Unfortunately, elder abuse in our society is real—unscrupulous family members who will do anything to get their hands on the assets of their parents or other elderly relatives. I am aware of many examples of this practice both as a former minister for housing and as a local MP for my electorate of Everton.

No legislation is tight enough to stop manipulative people placing massive guilt on their relatives. No legislation can stop coercion, nor can it prevent the vulnerable older person, terminally ill who does not want to be a burden on their family, having the belief that it would be best for everybody if they ended it earlier, even if it is not the dying one's heart's desire.

What will the consequences of this legislation look like in 10 years time? Will we allow those who are disabled or who suffer from mental illness to end their lives? What about those who are just tired of life? It is inevitable that this will occur. Also, the taboo that is currently associated with suicide will eventually disappear. How can we discourage this practice, this tragedy, especially with young people, when we legitimise it with another group of society? The slippery slope associated with this legislation is real and, in my opinion, brings great risk to the most vulnerable in our society.

I now come to my third point. I also believe that no-one should die in pain or alone. Every decent person believes that. That is why comprehensive palliative care needs to be available to every Queenslanders. The Deputy Premier said in his speech on this bill that dying and suffering Queenslanders deserve a choice. Well, Deputy Premier, they do, but I would argue that not all Queenslanders have that choice. It is not a level playing field.

People who live in regional and remote Queensland do not have access to the palliative care services that I can access here in Brisbane. With Queensland being the most decentralised state, it is imperative that more money is invested in the palliative care sector. The sector believes \$270 million per year is required to provide adequate services across the state. The health minister said in her speech that current projections will see \$250 million per year allocated in 2025-26. Colleagues, this is not a commitment by the government; it is a projection. High-level palliative care is the most humane, caring and loving way to help somebody navigate the end of life and everybody in this vast state has the right to have genuine access to it.

I now come to the final reason I will oppose this bill. I have great respect for the over 11,000 LNP members in Queensland. They joined the party to be part of the policy development of our party. In 2019—the last time the party had a chance to debate policy resolutions—the issue of voluntary assisted dying was revisited and debated. The result was that a healthy majority of LNP members did not support the policy. Whilst I appreciate that LNP members of parliament have been granted a conscience vote—and I agree with that—I also believe that LNP members are looking for their members of parliament to support the policies they have passed at our conventions, and I intend to respect their opinion.

There will be amendments brought to the House that primarily relate to the freedoms of faith based health providers. Knowing that I will oppose the substantive bill, I would normally not support amendments as I feel it is misleading and disingenuous. It suggests that if those amendments get up I will vote for the bill. The circumstances of this bill are different. It would seem that the bill will pass, unfortunately in my opinion, quite easily. Knowing that, I am willing to make a bad bill less damaging so I will support the proposed amendments that will be moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. In closing, I say that human life is precious and we should not introduce any law that diminishes that value. I will oppose this bill.