

Submission from Henry Gray, retired. Address details at end of this submission.

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING (VAD) MUST BE RESTORED

The Northern Territory Voluntary Euthanasia Bill of 1997 was one of the most enlightened and visionary pieces of legislation ever passed by our Assembly. The Kevin Andrews/Tony Bourke bill's overturning in the Federal Parliament was callous, cruel, and indifferent.

For the federal parliament to pass this repeal bill was denying the Territory rights.

Over time, a significant number of people with terminal illnesses have been robbed of natural justice. Many have endured untoward suffering in their final weeks and months of life.

In the 28 years since the right to die in the NT was snuffed out, all states and the ACT have moved over time to establish VAD laws within their jurisdictions—except the Northern Territory, where processes have been delayed and delayed again

I am a believer in and supporter of Voluntary Assisted Dying. I wrote the following letter to Kevin Andrews some eight years ago and share the text.

Mr K Andrews. MP

Member for Menzies

PO Box 124

DONCASTER VIC. 3108

Sent by email per Mr Michael Barrett

Dear Mr Andrews

For a long time, I have been distressed that you saw fit to introduce a private member's bill into the Federal Parliament during the Howard years, which went on to overturn the Northern Territory Euthanasia Act. I have harboured resentment about this for many years.

The NT Euthanasia Laws were well shaped and carefully structured by our then Chief Minister Marshall Perron. It was a day of relief rather than rejoicement when those laws were enacted into legislation.

Conversely, it was a day of somewhat astounded and disbelieving sadness, yet inevitability, when your private member's bill got its overriding guernsey in Federal Parliament. I do not know if this bill was your initiative or whether you were prevailed upon to move it to the parliament by other members of the Coalition. In any case, the rescinding of our most reasonable NT Act did our Territory and Northern Territorians a great disservice.

It is interesting that, by degree, the world is starting to catch up with Mr Perron's 'Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill', which became part of our law over 20 years ago.

I have just turned 70. In my time, members of my family have passed in sad circumstances during which their rationality and their humanity were progressively dismantled by creeping loss of body and mind. I have seen that happen for many people, and my awareness grows with age.

For mine, I am desirous of incorporating into the provisions of my hastening old age a condition that should I become incapable or demented, to the point of my reliance on life becoming the full responsibility of others, that I will be allowed to decline my mortality: That I be allowed this as a legitimate right to determine, while still of sound body and mind.

Your bill stripped me of a fundamental human right and the possibility of action that should be an entitlement. I was deeply disappointed in what you did then. That disappointment remains to this day.

Sincerely

Henry Gray

11 March 2016

Copied:

Ms Natasha Griggs, Member for Solomon

Ms Nicole Manison, Member of Wanguri NT Legislative Assembly

Mr Andrews eventually replied blandly. To tell me in broad brush terms that the Federal Parliament, acting on its operational principles, scuttled one of the wisest, most decent and empathetic pieces of legislation ever introduced into any Australian Parliament.

My belief in VAD has only strengthened over the years. I have been witness to far too much human suffering occasioned by the 'keep him/her alive at all costs mentality that underpins the position we still confront in the Northern Territory.

AGED CARE IS A FRIGHTENING PROSPECT

The Royal Commission into Aged Care in Darwin suggests that many establishments 'caring' for older people are nothing but 'Houses of Horror'. What goes on is stunning. And there is a fair chance that aged care will be the only option for those required to stay alive until death finally intercedes.

Maybe some establishments measure up in terms of empathetic care, but they seem to be few and far between.

Profit motives and shareholder priorities seem to be setting the scene that follows. Aged care should not be an industry for profit.

While there may be issues of lack of training and qualifications for carers, there is no way that those with full training and registration will command salaries commensurate to their skill level. Aged care centres will continue employing people who are still developing their skill sets because that will be less of a salary drain on their budgets.

And remember, many of these centres have to make profits for the sake of shareholders.

I am 79 and find the whole issue of aged care frightening. Euthanasia is a much-preferred option to committing to what is equivalent to imprisonment in places where the only thing that seems to count is profit for private owners.

Aged care should not be an 'industry' supporting wealthy owners lining their pockets with profits from those in care. They too often pay the most for the least and are held to ransom by 'agreements' with acceptable print clauses and exceptions.

Nursing care in retirement homes has been revealed to be fraught with challenges and systemic weaknesses.

It is stories like these and the myriad of recounts about aging citizens being taken to the cleaners and reduced to nothingness that makes me yearn for the legitimisation of euthanasia. I would like very much to be able to nominate the condition of my physical and mental state past which I cannot go. I do not want to live as a minimalist human with a soul and mind equivalent to a vacuum within a decrepit frame that is no more than shell-like. What an appalling way to eke out one's days.

THOUGHTS ON MENTAL DETERIORATION

People with onset Alzheimer's should be allowed to opt to plan for future VAD to avoid becoming human vegetables.

I am an old slice of bread. I would prefer, if I got to the point of depending on my children because of physical ailment or mental incapacity, to opt-out.

There is no way that I want to end my life living in misery and causing that for my children. While I have my faculties about me, I should have the right to determine a euthanasia-based death so that I do not become a burden to others. I would hate to become an affliction, a vacuous empty-headed person for others to bear.

THE WAY THIS ISSUE IS WEIGHTED

I am conscious we live in a community where multiculturalism and population plurality can add to complexities on key issues. My hope is that common sense will prevail - as it already has in every other state and territory - and that race, culture, creed and belief will not sway the ultimate VAD recommendations.

In my opinion, the first report prepared while the Fyles Government was in place, quite excellently considered the VAD issue from all angles, with the recommendations of its 132 pages based on salient interpretation of all relevant factors.

Along with many Territorians , I could not see the need for a further inquiry to inquire into what the first inquiry had exhaustively investigated when coming up with its recommendations. I hope we will move quickly from process to action outcome on this key issue.

Sincerely

Henry Gray OAM
August 29 2025

