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I am a support worker for the Finke River Mission of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand. I work with indigenous people in central Australia. My focus is on the Pintupi-Luritja language area. So that includes the communities of Ikuntji (Haast's Bluff), Papunya, Watiyawanu (Mt Liebig) and Wałungurru (Kintore). Ninety percent of the time I communicate with Pintupi-Luritja people in their own language. When I talk with Anmatyerre or Alyawarre speakers, I try, as much to possible, to allow for their grammatical and cultural thought forms. I have been in this job for nearly 24 years. I lived in Papunya for nearly 18 years. I have a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of Melbourne.

I find it somewhat strange that neither the Finke River Mission nor the Lutheran Church are listed as stakeholders in the long list in the VAD enquiry guidelines. (Only Lutheran Care is mentioned. But in day to day operations, Lutheran Care mainly functions as a distinct entity.) The Lutheran church is probably still the largest denomination among aboriginal people in the southernmost part of the Northern Territory. The Finke River Mission's area of operations stretches from Docker River to Ampilatwatja, from Kintore to Titjikala, and from Tara to Imanpa. In most of those areas the Lutheran Church is the main Christian denomination. And Christianity is still very important for most indigenous people in central Australia. You can see this in the way that funerals are conducted in remote communities.

I wish to express my opposition to the introduction of Voluntary Assisted dying in the Northern Territory from four different perspectives; firstly, from the Australian Lutheran Church's official position; secondly, from my own personal perspective as a Christian; thirdly, from my own perspective as a human being of good will; and fourthly, as a linguist working with Central Australian indigenous people.

1) The Australian Lutheran Church's official position is that Voluntary Assisted Dying cannot be supported.

"The LCA NZ does not support Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD), however it undertakes to support all people, seeking to bring God's love to life in crucial life and death situations. Staff and volunteers in aged care and other community care settings will not participate in the processes of VAD or seek to influence decisions, as directed by state laws. However, a respectful and pastoral approach will be negotiated and maintained throughout the process, extending to family members as they face imminent bereavement and the need for after-death rituals and family care."

This statement was written in July 2023. Further information is obtainable from the LCA NZ website, or from contacting Andrew Brook, bishop of the LCA NZ's SA-NT District on [andrew.brook@lca.org.au](mailto:andrew.brook@lca.org.au) .

2) My own view as a Christian is that God is the One who decides when we are born and when we die. In other words, life is sacred. As is sometimes said at funerals, "The *Lord* gives, and the *Lord* takes away". (Note that this statement from the Book of Job is the common heritage of all three great Abrahamic religions.)

3) As a human being of goodwill I believe that voluntary assisted dying is actually despair masquerading as hope. Dylan Thomas's poem written to his aged father is blunt, but

still apt: “Do not go gently into the night....” It can apply to all of us. To “go gently” into “the night” - into death - is to ultimately demean humanity. (So Andrew Denton is misguided.) I remember reading a critical review of the film “Meet Joe Black”. The reviewer wrote, I believe rightly, that the movie was fundamentally wrong for not depicting Death as a cheating anarchist who needs to be raged against right to the end. So I applaud traditional Australian indigenous culture for its loud, ongoing, public expressions of grief when a loved one dies. It can be confronting to an Anglo-Celtic Australian. But I believe the aboriginal attitude to death to be basically healthy and realistic. We are all diminished by the death of one of our number. We are all connected. No one is an island. As such, voluntary assisted dying represents individualism taken to an aberrant extreme.

- 4) As a linguist working with Central Australian indigenous people I constantly confront communication conundrums. Surprisingly often, they are on a scale that most people don't realise. So, based on my experience, if VAD is brought in it will, *at best*, be difficult to enable most traditional aboriginal people to distinguish between VAD and outright suicide. Many will see it as an endorsement of suicide by knowledgeable white people. I am not saying that it is necessarily right for them to see it in that way. But I am saying that it *will* happen for some, once they hear about it. Many good, well-meaning people in the Top End of the Northern Territory need to realise the noticeable difference in education, literacy, English language and world-awareness standards between indigenous people in northern and central Australia. Aboriginal people in central Australia have limited access to information, and, even if they can access it, it is often in language that they are only partly sure of. (I could write pages and pages just on this issue.) But don't just take my word for it. Ask any experienced central Australian linguist or schoolteacher. I am sure that every one of them will agree with me about the scale of the communication gap. So, even if VAD *were* the right way to go, the only responsible approach would be to delay its rollout for a decade or two until the the Territory's huge indigenous population was able to fully comprehend what is taking place. I believe to bring it in now is to risk havoc in some of our most vulnerable communities. Outbreaks of copycat suicide are hard enough to suppress. Bringing in VAD in the Northern Territory at the moment will only make that task harder.