

South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc. (SAVES)

Patrons: Emeritus Professor JA Richardson Emeritus Professor Graham Nerlich

President Frances Coombe

Internet: <http://www.saves.asn.au>



The Hon J Hill
Member for Kaurna

4/5/07

Dear Mr Hill

It's time for politicians to 'grasp the nettle'

In a recent newspaper article ('Who Dares?' Sunday Mail 15th April 2007) the leader of the state opposition, Mr Martin Hamilton-Smith, made the following comments in respect of law reform to allow choice for voluntary euthanasia:

I am not a supporter. I can't imagine fail-safe legislation that would prevent abuse. Politicians should not play God'.

This dual-focused critique of law reform is a familiar one from certain members of parliament with a religious upbringing that does not permit consideration of the right to choose.

No legislation in any policy area can ever be fail-safe. However, well-considered and insightful legislation that is open to constant review always provides for a safer and more equitable social foundation than ad hoc responses, or where politicians fail to 'grasp the nettle'. Reliable replicating studies¹ show that greater abuse exists in countries including Australia without legislation, than in jurisdictions such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Oregon USA that permit assisted-suicide or voluntary euthanasia with strong safeguards, oversight and reporting mechanisms.

In respect of 'playing God', thousands of people face life and death decisions every day. They are 'playing God' because they must. People must make difficult decisions about their dying, in the same way that they do about their living. Political decision-making should respect the views of individuals who face difficult and complex decisions about all aspects of their lives, in light of their own faith and reason.

In February this year 80% of South Australians supported the Newspann survey question:
"If a hopelessly ill patient, experiencing unrelievable suffering, with absolutely no chance of recovering, asks for a lethal dose, so as not to wake again, should a doctor be allowed to provide a lethal dose or not ?"

Society elects politicians to legislate for the common good. This means balancing the harm and good to society of all bills brought before them, fulfilling their chosen responsibility and serious obligation to draft and continually refine the best laws possible.

Currently the *Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2006*, (now entitled the *Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2007*) is in the House of Assembly. To assist you in addressing the urgent issue of voluntary euthanasia I recently sent you a flow chart of this Bill, depicting its wide-ranging safeguards. Our website www.saves.asn.au has more information and I am at your service to help you further if needed.

Yours sincerely,

Frances Coombe
President

1. Kuhse H, Singer P, Baume P, Clark M, Rickard M *End-of-life decisions in Australian medical practice*. Med J Aust 1997; 166: 191-6.