



Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New South Wales

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Promoting end-of-life choice

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National Human Rights Consultation Secretariat
Attorney-General's Department
Central Office
Robert Garran Offices
National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

Submission from The Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New South Wales (VESNSW)

VESNSW, representing some 2,140 members, asks that the Commission give fair and serious consideration to a human right of a dignified and non-traumatic death when a person is experiencing unrelievable and intolerable suffering due to a terminal and incurable illness, and that person is requesting medical assistance to end their life in a manner acceptable to themselves.

Voluntary euthanasia is an action taken by, or at the request of, a rational fully-informed individual whose intention is to be relieved of unbearable suffering, and that relief is sought by the sufferer through an intervention designed to produce a humane and dignified death.

Since the Australian Parliament's overturning in 1997 of the Northern Territory's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* Australia's seriously ill sufferers have lost the human right to die peacefully and with dignity at a time and place, and in a manner, of their own choosing. Legislation for voluntary euthanasia, based on recognition of this human right, applies to the relatively few extreme cases of unrelievable suffering or a terminal and incurable illness—that is, those unfortunate individuals with intractable suffering where palliative care cannot help and where quality of life is such that, as far as the sufferer is concerned, death is preferred. However, the human right must be held for all members of a humane and compassionate society, being invoked in action only for those few cases, as indicated above, where it is warranted. Of course, legislation must have stringent safeguards and contain severe penalties for any misuse.

Because Australia lacks such humane and compassionate legislation, based on recognition of this human right, we have the current shameful situation of three suicides a week among Australians 75 years or older, using hanging, firearms, carbon monoxide, drowning, suffocation, jumping from high places, electrocution and so on. These are not dignified and non-traumatic deaths. It is highly likely that some of these people are driven to such desperate action because Australia lacks humane and compassionate assisted-dying legislation.

The Commission can make a substantial contribution to our society through the recognition and support for a human right of a peaceful and dignified death, applied under the circumstances described above. We trust the Commission will be outspoken along these lines.

Dr Robert Marr
President, VESNSW