



Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
Member for Murchison

Our ref: 03/70/30

2 November 2011

John D Harrower OAM
Bishop of Tasmania
1st Floor, Church House
125 Macquarie Street
Hobart TAS 7001

Dear Reverend,

Thank you for your letter dated 16 August 2011, in which you outline the Anglican Church of Tasmania's opposition to legalised euthanasia.

By way of background you may be aware that I have a background in health and have a deep compassion for people who are suffering from debilitating and agonising terminal illnesses. I have sat with these people and with their families and have been very aware of the suffering of these people. As a midwife predominantly, I have not worked in the area of palliative care at all in recent years. I have, however, sat with parents holding their dying baby within hours or days of their birth – this too has been heartbreaking.

Rest assured that I will be fully considering all aspects of this debate which has many ethical, moral, legal and medical implications and considerations. I believe that this is a highly complex and contentious issue. I do not personally believe it is just a matter of agreeing or disagreeing with the principle. I believe that to fully comprehend this extremely important issue, many other aspects must be considered, particularly the medico-legal aspects of any bill that may be presented.

These include, in my mind, the rights of individuals to make decisions regarding medical treatment and their life more broadly, the importance of choice and self determination, the extent of the pain and suffering that some individuals experience when suffering from incurable and terminal illness, the medical advances in treatment and prevention of terminal illness, the advances in palliative care, the grieving process for the individual and significant others, the

effectiveness of advance directives, the withdrawal of treatment as opposed to active intervention and if supported what safeguards would be needed and how would such safeguards be ensured.

I believe that it is not unreasonable for members of the community to have a fixed position of either support for or opposition to voluntary euthanasia as an issue however Members of Parliament as legislators will be required to go much further than to form an opinion on the issue of euthanasia, they will be faced with a technical legislative instrument that affects the rights and powers of individuals and whole professions in matters of life and death.

While debate around euthanasia is likely to focus strongly on questions of personal morality, there will also be technical medico-legal questions to consider as well as complex ethical issues. It is essential that those technical matters are properly investigated and clearly understood. If, at the end of the day, as a result of the democratic principle and regardless of any individual's personal position on this issue, Tasmania is to have such a law then we have a sworn obligation to make sure that it is the very best such legislation in every technical aspect.

On the other hand, if proposed Euthanasia laws are not supported and are voted down, we have an obligation to be able to clearly, carefully and compassionately explain to our constituents why the law was not supported and the moral, technical and ethical reasons behind the decision.

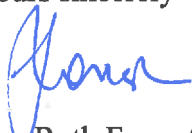
Medical advances in the last 10 years in not only palliative care and treatment, but also prevention and treatment of illnesses that have previously resulted in premature death or painful and prolonged illnesses that are ultimately terminal, have been significant in many areas and therefore the question of whether the avenue of voluntary euthanasia is needed could also be considered.

I certainly appreciate that there have been, and will continue to be, people who will experience traumatic and agonising end of life experiences, with or without a decision on this issue and I also acknowledge that what many people are seeking is just the choice to make decisions related to this time of their life.

In undertaking my research into this issue, I assure you that I will be considering all these important matters in forming my opinion and decision should the Legislative Council be called upon to debate the questions of legalised Euthanasia.

Thank you again for taking the time to comment on this important matter and for sharing your views with me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Forrest', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR MURCHISON