

AN UPDATE ON THE ABORTION DEBATE

*From the office of Bishop John Harrower
May 24, 2013*



What is the current status of the proposed changes?

- The Reproductive Health Bill (Access To Terminations) Bill 2013 passed the House of Assembly of the Tasmanian Parliament on April 16, 2013. All members of the Greens party, and all members of the Labor Party, except The Hon. Michael Polley, voted for the Bill.
- The Bill has NOT become law. It must now be considered by the Legislative Council. The Bill has passed the first reading in the Legislative Council. This simply means that the Council has agreed to consider it.
- The Legislative Council will consider the Bill in detail in the coming weeks, probably sometime in June. It may choose to reject the Bill, to pass the Bill as it currently stands, refer the Bill to a committee for proper consideration, or to change (amend) the Bill and return it to the House of Assembly.

What is actually being proposed, as it currently stands?

- The Minister for Children (The Hon. Michelle O'Byrne) released a Draft Bill in March. Our submission (see <http://imaginarydiocese.org/bishopjohn/2013/04/05/abortion-tas-anglican-submission/>) was based on this Draft Bill. The Bill that passed the House of Assembly was slightly different to the draft but not in any substantial way. The key concerns, as presented in our submission, remain.
- The Bill, as it stands:
 - implements “abortion on request” for any reason, up to 16 weeks of pregnancy.
 - allows abortion at any stage in pregnancy after 16 weeks if a doctor and a specialist agree that proceeding with the pregnancy would be to the detriment of the mother. The doctor must take into account a number of circumstances, including the social and economic impact on the woman. These broad grounds effectively remove any restriction, even for late term pregnancies.
 - compels doctors who have a conscientious objection to facilitate in an abortion by referring any patient who is seeking “pregnancy advice” to a doctor who will provide the abortion. This overrides a doctors professional judgement and duty of care. It questions the professionalism of all those who ascribe human value to the unborn child. Failure to refer runs the risk of deregistration and unemployment.
 - compels “counsellors” (broadly defined as any form of advice-giver) to similarly refer those seeking advice. The penalty is approx \$30,000 fine or imprisonment.
 - implements “access zones” that prohibits certain activities within 150m of an abortion provider.
 - has other technical issues that demonstrate that it has been sloppily and hastily drafted.
- The stated aim of the Bill is to decriminalise abortion. None of the issues outlined above need to arise in order to achieve this aim. If abortion is to be decriminalised, it should not be done like this.

What can I do?

- We encourage you to make contact with the members of the Legislative Council in order to communicate your views on the matter.
- The best form of communication is a letter, phone call or email that thoughtfully outlines the particular ways in which you disagree with the Bill. You may wish to urge them to reject the Bill or to at least significantly amend it. You may wish to tell them that the aim of decriminalisation should not be achieved through the measures currently included in the Bill.
- Contact details of Legislative Councillors are attached.
- There is a petition that can be signed either on paper or via the parliamentary website. Sign one or the other but NOT BOTH. The paper version is provided. The electronic version can be found at <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/EPetitions/Council/CurrentEPetition.aspx?PetNum=14&Index=-1>

Members of Legislative Council (May 2013)

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PETITION – can only be signed once, either in this paper or electronic form, NOT both

To the Honourable the President and Members of the Legislative Council, in Parliament assembled.

The Petition of the undersigned Citizens of Tasmania draw to the attention of the Legislative Council that:
if allowed to pass, the Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Bill 2013 will:

1. Allow the abortion on demand of unborn babies up to 16 weeks of age from conception for any reason and allow the abortion of unborn babies from 16 weeks of age to term for such a wide range of reasons (current and future physical, psychological, social and economic concerns) as to effectively constitute abortion on demand. As such, this Bill fails to acknowledge or protect the human rights of unborn babies.
2. Remove any requirement for offering counselling prior to a woman undergoing an abortion.
3. Continue to impose possible short and long term physical and psychological consequences of abortion on women's health.
4. Impose professional and legal sanctions on doctors and counsellors who do not refer to abortion services for reasons of conscientious objection.
5. Restrict free speech by placing further sanctions on peaceful protest within 150 metres of an abortion facility.

And your petitioners therefore request the Legislative Council to reject the Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Bill 2013 in its entirety.

NAME (Please print name)	ADDRESS (Please print address in full)	SIGNATURE

Please return to GPO Box 1158 Hobart Tas 7001 (by Friday, 21 June 2013)

