

MY LIFE MY CHOICE

A newsletter for supporters of voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland — No.10 March 2020

Newest MPs must support VAD

In this edition of our *My Life My Choice* newsletter we reveal the attitudes to voluntary assisted dying law reform of candidates seeking to be new state MPs for Bundamba and Currumbin.

The four Bundamba candidates and the four seeking to be the new MP for Currumbin on 28 March were all asked three simple questions seeking “yes/no” answers.

The questions sought to find out if those seeking to become lawmakers for our state support VAD laws; if they will vote in accordance with their constituents’ views on voluntary assisted dying; and if they think the



Swift action needed on new laws

This line-up of seven pairs of shoes (left) graphically shows the need to act swiftly on voluntary assisted dying law reform.

Data from the [National Coronial Information System](#) given to the current cross-party Health Committee Inquiry into end-of-life issues shows seven Queenslanders with terminal or debilitating physical conditions take their own lives each month. It’s a figure higher than the average of one similar death a week noted in evidence to previous parliamentary inquiries in Victorian and West Australia.

How many more sets of seven empty pairs of shoes will we see before action is taken?

CANDIDATES RESPOND TO OUR QUESTIONS

SEE PAGES 2-3

subject of a conscience vote so all MPs need to know the views of constituents and constituents need to know where their local MP stands.

Check the responses from candidates inside and if you live and vote in Bundamba or Currumbin let them all know your views and how strongly you feel.

issue should be resolved before the election.

Any new law on voluntary assisted dying will be the

Voters in Bundamba and Currumbin need to know before polling day on the 28 March where their next state MP stands.



David Muir
Chair
The Clem Jones Trust

Speaking from personal experience

The state Member for Macalister, Melissa McMahon, hosted a community forum on end-of-life issues including voluntary assisted dying in early March at Beenleigh.

[Ms McMahon](#) said she wanted her constituents to be informed on the issue.

Guest speakers and panellists included the CEO of Palliative Care Queensland, Shyla Mills, chair of the Clem Jones Trust, David Muir, and Queensland convenor of



Picture from left: David Muir, Melissa McMahon, Sid Finnigan, and Shyla Mills at the forum

Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice, Dr Sid Finnigan.

Ms McMahon told the forum that as a young police officer she had experienced the human impact of the actions some people with irreversible physical decline

took themselves. She told of an elderly man who took his own life at his daughter’s home in horrendous circumstances.

Ms McMahon said even today she still reflects on the case in the context of the options people

SA POLICE BACK VAD LAWS — PAGE 3

RALLY POSTPONED



Unfortunately the current coronavirus crisis has led to the postponement of the public rally planned for Thursday 19 March outside Parliament House in George Street. Keep informed of the VAD campaign by visiting www.dwdq.org.au.

@DWDQLD
Phone: 1300 733 818

You can now follow us on [Facebook @mlmcaus](#) and [Twitter @mlmcaus](#)



How the candidates view VAD

Greens and Labor flagbearers give clearest commitments

By David Muir
Chair of the Clem Jones Trust

Candidates from the Greens and the Labor Party in the Currumbin and Bundamba by-elections have expressed the strongest support among all candidates for voluntary assisted dying law reform.

Candidates for the Greens in both by-elections gave unqualified “yes” responses to our three questions.

The Labor Party candidate in Currumbin was just as unequivocal and the party’s candidate in Bundamba also gave in-principle support to VAD laws in Queensland.

The LNP candidate in the Currumbin by-election did not directly back VAD and the party’s candidate in Bundamba did not respond to questioning.

The One Nation candidate in Bundamba said ‘no’ to VAD while that party’s Currumbin candidate did not respond.

This range of responses reflects the differing personal

BY-ELECTION FACTS:

- Pre-poll voting starts Monday 16 March
- Polling day Saturday 28 March
- Held on the same day as local council polls



Laura Gerber
LNP



Sally Spain
The Greens



Kaylee Campradt
Labor Party

views of candidates which shows why VAD must be subject to a conscience vote as both major party leaders have indicated.

The Clem Jones Group did not pose the questions in a

bid to endorse any of the candidates in either of the by-elections.

We simply want to present their responses to allow voters who support VAD to make an informed choice on 28 March.

The questioning of state candidates on VAD will be repeated at the October election if any new laws recommended by the Health Committee Inquiry have not been resolved by State Parliament by then.



CURRUMBIN:

Previous MP: Jann Stuckey, LNP since 2004

2017 election:

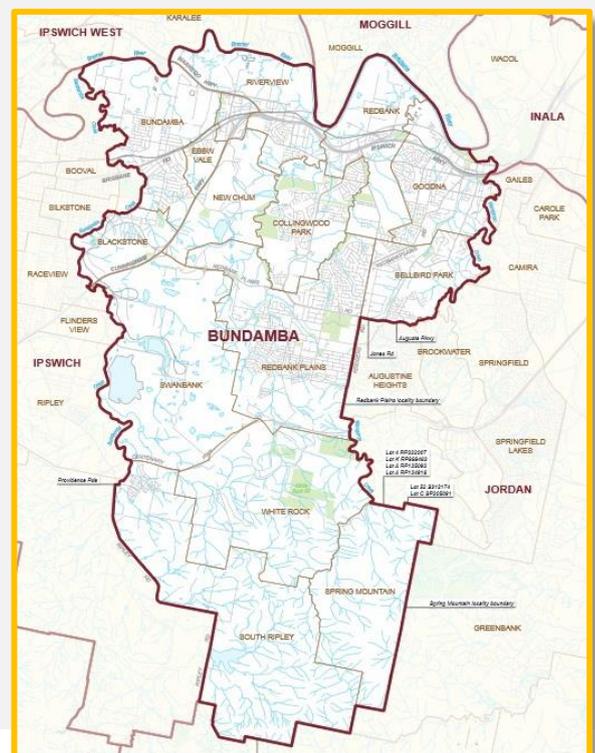
- 27,713 formal votes
- Two-party-preferred result:
 - LNP 53.31%
 - Labor Party 46.69%

BUNDAMBA:

Previous MP: Jo-Ann Miller, Labor since 2000

2017 election:

- 26,024 formal votes
- Two-party-preferred result:
 - Labor Party 71.55%
 - LNP 28.45%



THE BUNDAMBA FIELD:



Robert Shearman
LNP



Sharon Bell
One Nation



Danielle Mutton
The Greens



Lance McCallum
Labor Party



QUESTION 1: In principle, and in the acknowledged current absence of specific proposed legislation for Queensland, do you believe a competent adult who is terminally ill or has a neurodegenerative disorder and is experiencing suffering which cannot be relieved should have the right to request access to a regulated system of voluntary assisted dying with specific eligibility criteria and protections as now available in Victoria, West Australia?

QUESTION 2: If elected, and regardless of your personal views, do you undertake to represent the views of your constituents on the issue of voluntary assisted dying when it comes to voting on any Bill arising from the Health Committee Inquiry's recommendations?

QUESTION 3: As the Health Committee Inquiry was established by the current Queensland Parliament, and as it will report to the current Parliament, do you believe any voluntary assisted dying Bill arising from the Inquiry process should be considered and voted upon by the current Parliament before the scheduled state election in October?

CURRUMBIN

<p>Laura Gerber LNP</p>	<p>The issue polarises many parts of the community. It is an extremely complex issue that could have unintended consequences. The LNP believes priority should be on ensuring the highest standards of palliative care and end-of-life health conversations.</p>	<p>If elected, I will always represent the views of my community, to the best of my ability.</p>	<p>A VAD Bill should not be rushed because an election is looming.</p>
<p>Sally Spain The Greens</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Nicholas Bettany One Nation</p>	<p>No response</p>	<p>No response</p>	<p>No response</p>
<p>Kaylee Campradt Labor Party</p>	<p>Yes. I support the right of Queenslanders to request access to a regulated system of VAD. Dying. The approach taken in Victoria and WA are positive examples.</p>	<p>Yes. I share the overwhelming view of Currumbin (and Queensland) residents in supporting the introduction of a regulated system of VAD. I would continue the work (both in the community and the parliament) that the previous member Jann Stuckey has started on this important issue.</p>	<p>Yes. I am aware of the significant community desire to move swiftly to implement the outcomes of the Health Committee Inquiry. I think this is an issue that has been well considered and thought through, is in line with community expectations, and as far as possible should be above party political considerations.</p>

BUNDAMBA

<p>Sharon Bell One Nation</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes. I will undertake to represent the views of the constituents.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Lance McCallum Labor Party</p>	<p>In principle, people who are experiencing terminal suffering for which there is no relief, should have the option to have access to a safe, strictly enforced, regulatory framework, should they choose to consider voluntary assisted dying.</p>	<p>It is every community representative's fundamental responsibility to represent the views of their constituents. As a Member of Parliament, I would always listen to the people I was elected to represent.</p>	<p>The Premier has publicly indicated that the government will consider the Committee Inquiry's final report once it is finalised and tabled. Like any other piece of legislation, any prospective bill would be subject to the normal parliamentary process.</p>
<p>Danielle Mutton The Greens</p>	<p>Yes, the Greens' policy is in favour of VAD legislation.</p>	<p>Yes, I will represent the views of my constituents.</p>	<p>Yes, the Greens favour action on VAD laws before the state election.</p>
<p>Robert Shearman LNP</p>	<p>No response</p>	<p>No response</p>	<p>No response</p>

Questioning continues if government doesn't act

The questioning of candidates on VAD will be repeated before the October state election if any new laws recommended by the current Health Committee Inquiry have not been resolved by State Parliament before then.

Sitting MPs and would-be local members in all 93 seats will be asked to tell voters before polling day exactly where they stand.



SA Police see benefits in VAD laws

South Australian Police have cited suicide data for terminally ill people as a reason for their in-principle backing of voluntary assisted dying law reform.

The SA Police Force's submission to the inquiry by the [South Australian Parliament's End-of-Life Choices Committee](#) said 10 South Australians who were terminally ill took their own lives from January 1 to June 30 2019.

In the submission SA Police Assistant Commissioner Scott Duval said: "Many deaths in those circumstances are undignified, violent and often committed in isolation, which on occasion results in the death not becoming known to others for some time. There may also be a degree of pain suffered."

Police back laws to help people die with dignity

REBECCA DIGIROLAMO
 SOUTH AUSTRALIA Police support strict euthanasia law reform, saying more than one in 10 suicides involve terminally ill people.
 Assistant Commissioner Scott Duval said SA Police supported law changes that would, under certain, prescribed conditions, allow South Australians to die with dignity under proper medical supervision.
 His backing for legal reform was made on behalf of SA Police in a submission to State Parliament's End of Life Choices Committee, which is due to hear more evidence in weeks. Mr Duval, pictured, said 10 South Australians who were terminally ill took their own lives from January 1 to June 30 last year. He said their deaths accounted for about 11 per cent of the 90 investigated suicides for that period; in addition to a further seven people aged from 71 to 91 who took their own lives due to age.
 "Many deaths in those circumstances are undignified, violent and often committed in isolation, which on occasion results in the death not becoming known to others for some time," Mr Duval said in the submission. "There may also be a degree of pain suffered."
 He said it was not uncommon for people to commit suicide as a consequence of loneliness and old age.
 The SA Police submission said 238 people suicided in 2018/19, an increase from 203 the previous year. It is an offence under SA law to assist in a suicide or a suicide attempt.
 The End of Life Choices joint committee was set up to report on the laws required to establish assisted suicide in SA and investigate how end of life was currently managed for the chronically and terminally ill across the state.
 The committee will prepare a report for Parliament once hearings end in coming weeks.
 Proposed legislation, expected to be modelled on laws introduced in Victoria in June last year and Western Australia in December, is likely to reach Parliament for debate by the end of this year.
 In Victoria, 52 of the 81 people with permits for self or practitioner-administered lethal medication ended their lives between June 19 and December 31 last year.
IF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW NEEDS HELP, CALL SPEECHLINE ON 133 134 OR BEYOND BLUE ON 1300 324 636.

Adelaide Advertiser 21 February 2020

The End of Life Choices joint committee was set up by [Kyam Maher](#), a Labor Party MP in the SA Upper House since 2012. The committee's hearings are due to end in coming weeks after which it is expected to recommend VAD laws for debate.

The submission noted that a total of 238 suicides were recorded in the state in 2018/19.

The SA Police Force's stand is most welcome because it clearly reflects community attitudes in favour of giving the terminally ill who are suffering at the end of life another option to consider if they meet the

criteria set out in legislation.

It also recognises the impact such suicides have on police officers who are expected to deal with what can often be horrifying and traumatising death scenes.



Jos Hall
 President
 Dying With Dignity Queensland
www.dwdq.org.au

The ripple effects.....

Senior police in other states have previously recognised the impacts of self-inflicted deaths by terminally ill people can have on their staff as first responders.

"Prior to my coming to the Crime Command I was the divisional superintendent for Melbourne and had 800 police under my command.
 "I was regularly briefed regarding our frontline first responder officers who attended these types of suicides.
 "As you heard from the coroners, the desperation and the will of some people to take their lives have exposed our police to fairly horrific scenes of suicide.
 "I think that the police who attend these events, like ambulance officers and others — our police are only fairly junior and inexperienced and quite young — and I think the impact of dealing with the deceased persons at those horrific scenes, and also having to prepare inquest briefs for the coroner and taking statements from family members who are clearly desperate and frustrated with the system, I would just like to say that that does have some impact on our frontline police officers."



Acting Commander Rod Wilson
 Crime Command, Victoria Police
 From the [Victorian Parliament's Inquiry](#) into end-of-life choices
 7 October 2015

West Australian Police
Commissioner, Chris Dawson
 From the [WA Parliament's Inquiry](#) into end-of-life choices
 27 February 2018



CHAIR: As part of his evidence, Acting Commander Rob Wilson of Victoria Police described the effect of these violent deaths on first responders. Do you think there is any particular impact on police who deal with these cases?
COMMISSIONER OF WA POLICE FORCE, CHRIS DAWSON: Yes, there is. Police officers suffer the same emotions and these are often very upsetting matters for all parties concerned. We take steps both from initial recruit training, through to those officers who are regularly attending such deaths from our coronial, homicide and the like squads. They may attend these as a far more frequent matter. We have appointed a clinical psychologist to assist police officers to ensure their wellbeing—particularly their psychological care—is being properly cared for. Yes, my answer is that it does have an effect on police officers.

Beware false anti-VAD arguments

Despite being comprehensively disproved, opponents of voluntary assisted dying law reform continue to use the “slippery slope” argument.

This well-worn, yet false, argument involves claiming that implementing VAD laws somehow automatically opens the door to a widening of the scope of the laws to cover those in our society — usually vulnerable groups — who do not seek nor deserve to be covered.

VAD opponents have in the past pointed to changes made to VAD laws in overseas jurisdictions as “proof” that the slippery slope exists and that any law enacted in any state or territory in Australia would soon be drastically widened in similar ways.

They also ignore unequivocal statement such as those reported by parliamentary inquiries in Victoria and WA that found no such slippery slope exists.

“The slippery slope scenario has not materialised. Studies in jurisdictions which permit assisted dying have shown that vulnerable people are not more likely to receive assisted dying and suicide rates have not increased.”

Extract from the [final report](#) of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry

They also refuse to acknowledge that where laws in overseas jurisdictions have been altered, any changes have been the subject of the constitutional processes and scrutiny applied by each jurisdiction’s elected legislature.

Each nation or state that has passed VAD laws is sovereign and can review and alter its laws, but any changes do not flow to other jurisdictions as the slippery slope argument would have you believe.



Queensland Parliament ... sovereign

Any such amendments or reviews are a matter for the elected representatives of those nations or states, just as any VAD laws passed in Queensland will be the responsibility of the 93 MPs we all elect to sit in our State Parliament.

As if a “slippery slope” is not ludicrous enough, some VAD opponents are now touting another false argument ever since West Australia joined Victoria in passing VAD laws and in light of renewed efforts to have laws debated again in NSW, South Australia, and Tasmania.

This time it’s the old “domino theory” — that a law change in one state (Victoria) has sparked inevitable new laws in WA and will see other states adopt them too if we are all not careful.

Opponents have taken to focussing on differences in the laws passed in Victoria and WA and the differences between them and proposed Bills in other states.

This is just as baseless as the slippery slope.

“The Committee finds no evidence to suggest [the ‘slippery slope’] has occurred in the jurisdictions that have legislated for VAD. The Oregon legislation for example has never been amended in its 20 years of operation.”

From the [final report](#) of the WA Parliamentary Inquiry

“We found no evidence of institutional corrosion or the often cited ‘slippery slope’. Indeed, the regulatory framework has been unchanged in Oregon, the Netherlands and Switzerland for many years.”

Extract from the [final report](#) of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry

State parliaments around our nation are sovereign too and what one does will not automatically occur in another.

Each legislature decides its own laws.

While this simple fact shows such an argument to be false, it does reinforce the need for supports of VAD law reform in all states — and territories — to continue working hard.

“Examination of the international experience of legislating for voluntary assisted dying tells us that the ‘slippery slope’ is not a valid argument against assisted dying....”

From the [final report](#) of the WA Parliamentary Inquiry

Take time to simply ask your state MP if they are aware of published facts that clearly demonstrate the proven safeguards of VAD legislation. Ask if they will support VAD laws in our state.

Ask if pressure from their own political party will affect their “conscience vote” on VAD laws when the time comes.

It is your right to ask and receive clear answers to these questions from your parliamentary representative on this important issue that ultimately affects each and every one of us.



Dr Sid Finnigan MBBS, FRANZCO
Queensland Convenor
[Doctors For Assisted Dying Choice](#)

The *My Life My Choice* newsletter is produced by the Clem Jones Group, Dying With Dignity Queensland, and Doctors For Assisted Dying Choice (Queensland) for supporters of voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland. Contact: The Clem Jones Group 07 3391 3406 / admin@clemjonesgroup.com.au



[Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice](#)