I would like to thank the Victorian Government for opening this matter of “End Of Life” choices, a matter that has a profound impact on the length and extent of the suffering of many, usually in their later stage of life. Unfortunately it saddens me to realise that the decisions made from this inquiry may not be able to reflect the wishes of the majority of the public. Nevertheless I applaud the elected government for putting in place a process that will attempt to pursue the interests of its constituency and the public at large. The reasons for my anticipation of an outcome that is not truly representative of the majority of the public are a significant part of my submission. I would ask for your patience in entertaining my thoughts to their end.

Intransigence in Law

Why have previous attempts failed to make legislative changes that truly reflect the wishes of the majority of the public in “End Of Life” matters? I suggest that outcomes have been shown to be dictated by a political system whose outcome represents the decisions of politicians that follow their party or personal beliefs and interests but not the public’s interests. It is this very same system that cannot allow a referendum to be conducted. Greece was able to initiate and conclude a referendum in a week because the will was there.

It would appear that various interest groups have stolen the proxies of the people, otherwise this would not happen. Who are these groups and what is the justification for their attempting to dictate the allowable choices in “End of Life” plans. I would put aside cynical suggestions of it being:

a) those that benefits from the proceeds of medical expenditure on extending life, or
b) the egos of medical professionals that wish to prove they can make people live as long as possible regardless of the benefits to the patient.

I suggest it is powerful lobby groups in the main that have the interests of humanity as paramount. There must also be politicians who believe their personal beliefs reflect their electorate. These groups have benevolent interests and intentions. They appear to be empowered to make choices for the general public but are they legitimately empowered?

I haven’t said yet whether I believe in euthanasia, palliative care or any beliefs relevant to influencing the outcome of this inquiry. At the moment I am only discussing what will be likely to influence decisions to be made.

If it would be acceptable to move forward in the current argument on the basis that it is religious beliefs that have been the dominant influence on the current and seemingly entrenched position of our society I would like to continue focusing on this.

Does a religion lead its followers or does it speak for them? Is a person at liberty to choose their religion? If in Australian secular society the choice of a religion is that of the individual, then it is clear that the individual chooses to follow a religion (our society also includes atheists whose faith is that to them there is no God). So by free will an individual will follow their chosen religion. Not all individuals follow all aspects of their chosen religion; there are Orthodox, moderate & token followers. Did all Roman Catholics choose not to use a condom because of the Pope’s declaration on this? Did our secular state make it law that if one follows a particular religion one should follow every detail of that religion? We know this is impossible because factions appear in most religions over time and therefore individuals are repeatedly making choices. I would therefore conclude that the duty of our secular society is to protect the free will and choices of individuals
with regard to faith, religion and furthermore their choice as to aspects of their religion that they choose to accept or reject. The religion leads; it's the choice of an individual to follow.

**Democratic Change of the Law**

How does the government do justice to the secular society that it should proudly support? Governments often claim they have a mandate to enact policy. The problem with this is that each party has multiple policies and as we all know we are never asked to tick a box on the ballot papers as to which policies we agree with. I cannot imagine anyone arguing that everyone that votes for a party agrees with every policy. The more significant a policy is to the general public the more likely it is to be mandated but this gets very cloudy. Because "End Of Life" choices are not on the top of the list of priorities for many voters, it is not likely they will make a decision based on them. Unfortunately, I believe material interests have more immediate relevance to the majority; “End Of Life” policies are buried under “Start And Middle Of Life” priorities. **Therefore a referendum is the only practical way to find what is in the hearts of the individual.**

**FEAR**

I can't help believing that fear is a significant factor in this debate;

Fear that if people don't die naturally their soul won't go to heaven. This is based on faith and is therefore a personal choice.

Fear that if people are allowed to choose voluntary euthanasia in their “End Of Life” then they will be subject to unreasonable pressures and corrupt influences. This leads to the next fear.

Fear the state won't be able to ensure no wrong doing. Look at the news! Have we ever been able to completely stop wrong doing? No of course not, but what we have is a safe society, relatively speaking, and most of us benefit from a society that promotes freedom of choice. The state has a responsibility to have a process in place to encourage people to be law abiding and punish those that aren't. There are not many activities we have to make illegal simply because we fear abuse in that activity and that maybe police won’t be able to “police” it.

If for example, if the majority of individuals wanted euthanasia to be law, then legislation would be drawn up to minimise it’s abuse. Random selection of multiple doctors’ with their need for consent that the “End Of Life” request was bona fide would be a logical step. I cannot believe that the cost of this regulation could possibly be considered as an issue, therefore I won’t pursue defending it here.

**Let Democracy Work.**

It is difficult to believe that any of my personal stories could influence the outcome of this inquiry because I believe there are so many stories on record inside and outside of Australia that mine would not shift the argument, however my submission would be incomplete without something of a personal nature. I have stories of witnessed suffering, personal or from close friends and relatives. I have read arguments as to the justification or not of that suffering. Many people have opinions, let a democracy do its work and find what represents the majority of people.
The Personal Side

I saw an old woman suffering in the cancer treatment ward from her treatment. I watched her for a few days and she was in a very, very bad state. I finally went over to her and had a conversation. She stated in her words with no-one around us, that her eyesight was poor, she could not enjoy TV, books etc and at her age, the months of her treatment were so bad that she did not want to continue to live but her children wouldn’t let her go. I had seen her children visit and they appeared to be in their late thirties or older. How sad is that? I respect her values, wishes, faith or whatever you would like to say about what she said to me and that she had a right to her free will without pressure from anyone. Why should anyone on this planet have a right to speak for someone else that is perfectly capable and mature enough to speak for themselves?

I could go on at length about my mother’s suffering from a particularly cruel form of dementia. I don't believe it will have any more impact than what many of us already know so I will try to be brief. Her memory was failing five years before her death, then walking, bladder then bowel and an inability to complete a sentence and the tears and screaming frustration at having to continue through this “hell”. Her “End Of Life” wishes were pretty much pointless in our society. My father and I had many philosophical discussions (if only they were that impersonal) about whether 30 minutes maximum of mild happiness on a “good” day justified being tormented for so many hours a day and at best coping with the rest of the day. I would like someone to explain how they are in a better position than my mother to know what was right for her. Watching her body slowly die through the six days of palliative care is not an ideal end to an “angel” in my eyes. In my mind those six days were probably a lot better than the collective memories I have of the 18 months prior to that.

It should not matter to my arguments but I will nevertheless state the following. I do believe in a God, it's my god, a part of my faith, and it’s by my choice to do so. I do not expect anyone to understand my relationship with my God; it's between the two of us. I believe everyone should be entitled to exercise their freedom in choosing their God, their faith and making their personal choices in their “End Of Life”. It is their life and no one has a right to decide what is right for them.