

The AMA made important errors in its communication with Tasmania's Upper House about the Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) bill

On 30 November 2020, the AMA's Tasmanian Branch Council President Dr McArdle wrote on AMA letterhead to the Tasmanian House of Assembly, presenting the letter as the views of the AMA (endorsed by 9 named Tasmanian ex-Presidents) about the *Tasmanian End of Life Choices (Voluntary Assisted Dying) bill*. On the 4th of December, this bill passed its second reading in the Lower House and is now ready for debate in its committee stages.

The media in Tasmania were provided a copy of the letter, which is now public. The general public might well believe that letter to represent the views of Tasmania's doctors.

The AMA communications did not point out:

1. The AMA does not speak for all Tasmanian doctors. Fewer than 30% of the state's 2200 registered medical practitioners are in the AMA; membership is voluntary.
2. The AMA letter does not speak for Tasmania's AMA members. The overall level of support of, or opposition to, the VAD bill among AMA members, is not known.
3. There was no consultation with or survey of AMA members on the principle of VAD or on the bill's original draft, released many months ago by its mover in the Legislative Council, Michael Gaffney MP.
4. In addition, Tasmanian AMA members have not been consulted or surveyed about the amended bill as passed by the Legislative Council on the 10th of November 2020. The bill was passed without further amendment in the House of Assembly on the 4th of December 2020.

I have been a member of the AMA since 1986. Until now I have seen the state branch as being consistently altruistic and straightforward, working in the best interests of the public.

At the scheduled monthly meeting on July 2020 of the AMA's Launceston Division, the AMA's Tasmanian Branch Council was quoted along the lines:

"The Council is not keen on VAD in principle, but sees it as inevitable, and wants to have input assisting Parliament to draw up an Act which is as effective and safe as possible".

Unfortunately, the actions of the AMA President and ex-Presidents, in regard to the VAD bill, contradicts the measured and pragmatic statement of July 2020.

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