

KEY DATES IN THE BIRTH, LIFE AND DEATH OF THE N.T. RIGHTS OF THE TERMINALLY ILL ACT

16 Aug 1993 Perron asks the NT Women's Advisory Council to examine if the rights of terminally ill Territorians are adequately covered by the NT Natural Death Act. The WAC later advised they were not the appropriate group to make the assessment.

Nov 94 Perron wrote to 400 NT Doctors with enclosures from conferences on dying and the law seeking their views on decriminalising the actions of doctors who act to alleviate suffering of their patients by assisting their death upon request.

Dec 94 Perron told his CLP parliamentary colleagues he intended to introduce a private members Bill on VE next year.

1st Feb 95 Perron publicly announced his intention to introduce a Bill and mailed a comprehensive explanatory package to media, politicians, medical professionals, business and community organizations.

2nd Feb 95 Full page ad in the NT News explaining what the Bill intends.

3rd Feb 95 A call was made to refer the issue to a Parliamentary Committee. (Perron rejected the proposal as simply a delaying tactic but subsequently agreed on condition that the committee reports within 3 months and that its task was to receive submissions, not to decide yes/no to VE, that question was to be reserved for the Legislative Assembly)

12th Feb 95 NT News reports its phone poll returns 80.6% support for VE.

22nd Feb 95 Perron introduces the Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill 1995 in the Legislative Assembly.

24th Feb 95 Legislative Assembly establishes a select committee to receive submissions on the Bill. The committee travelled throughout the NT taking submissions and hearing witnesses. The committee brought several national speakers on both sides of the VE debate to the NT to make submissions.

24th May 95 The Bill was debated for 15 hours and passed with amendments.

23rd Nov 95 A Bill to amend the RTIA introduced to add a psychiatrist to the process and require interpreters to have prescribed qualifications.

10th Dec 95 Full page ad in the Sunday Territorian by the AMA displayed a letter to PM Keating pleading a case for the Governor General to refuse royal assent to this legislation and return it to the Northern territory Parliament. (The NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society also wrote to Keating)

15 Feb 96 NT News reports Keating rejected the AMA case *"The government believes that the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995 is a valid law of the NT and that it is up to people of the NT to express their views on that legislation, rather than the Commonwealth."*

20 Feb 96 The amendments (adding psychiatrist etc) were passed.

2nd Mar 96 Howard replaces Keating as PM

In accord with the Legislative Assembly Select Committees recommendations the NT Government implemented education programs about the RTIA aimed at the general public, aboriginal communities and professional groups.

Mar 96 An advisory group was formed to oversight the education program. The group had wide representation from Government and non Government sectors and was chaired by the Chief Health Officer of the NT. Additionally an aboriginal reference group with wide representation was established to oversight the aboriginal education program.

Funding was provided to the Top End and Central Australian Divisions of the General Practice to develop and distribute an information package for general practitioners and education sessions were conducted in all major centres in May and June. A video of the education session was made available to rural medical practitioners who were unable to attend sessions.

Funding was provided to the NT Chapter of the Royal College of Nursing to develop and implement an education program for nurses across the NT.

Funding was provided to Green Ant Research, Arts and Publishing Co to deliver education programs and material about the RTIA to remote and urban aboriginal communities and aboriginal health workers. Programs commenced in June 96.

A RITA information service was provided for the general community via an 1800 telephone line. Brochures were published and distributed covering the RTIA, palliative care and the Natural Death Act.

5th June 96 Draft regulations were released to the public for comment. (a highly unusual action, indicating the sensitivity surrounding the issue)

17th June 96 A writ was lodged in the NT Supreme Court by Wake + Gondarra claiming the Legislative Assembly did not have the power to pass the RTIA.

28th 96 June The regulations to the RTIA were proclaimed.

1st July 96 NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act commenced. (became law)

24th July 96 The full bench of the NT Supreme Court (Martin/Angel/Mildren) dismissed the claim the RTIA was invalid.

14th Aug 96 Wake + Gondarra Apply for special leave to appeal to the High Court of Australia.

9th Sept 96 Andrews MHR introduces his private members Bill 'Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996'

Four people use the RTIA Act to end their lives

Bob Dent	22/09/96
Janet Mills	02/01/97
Bill W	20/01/97
Valerie P	01/03/97

7th Nov 96 Senate Bills Committee refers Euthanasia Laws Bill to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee for enquiry. (An unusual step as the Bill was still being debated in the House of Reps. and therefore was not before the Senate.)

15th Nov 96 High Court of Australia considers the application by Wake + Gondarra to declare the RTIA invalid. The court adjourned consideration until the outcome of the Euthanasia Laws Bill (Andrews) was determined by Federal parliament.

9th Dec 96 House of Reps passed Euthanasia laws Bill 88/35
12 Dec 96 Euthanasia Laws Bill introduced in the Senate.

6th Mar 97 Legal & Constitutional Legislation Ctee report tabled in the Senate.
(The committee received over 12,500 submissions - the greatest number ever for a Senate hearing)

17th Mar 97 Debate commenced in the Senate.

During debate there were several motions to veto the Bill, defer consideration until a national referendum was held, replace the bill with one for the whole nation, for an exemption for two people who had met the conditions of RTIA and were yet to decide when to die, for a sunset clause so ELA expired in 2 years and to defer the third reading for 6 months. All amendments failed.

25th Mar 97 Senate passed Euthanasia Laws Act 1996 38/33 overturning RTIA, it was proclaimed by the Governor General 2 days later.