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MARSHALL PERRON
Member for Fannie Bay

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RIGHTS OF THE TERMINALLY ILL - REFORMING THE LAW

Northern Territory Chief Minister Marshall Perron wants the terminally ill to have the legal right to end their lives.

Mr Perron said his desire was to reform the law to give those who suffered the right to choose a death with dignity; to bring to an end the torture many endure on the death bed.

He will introduce a private member's Bill - entitled *Rights of the Terminally Ill* - in the next session of the Legislative Assembly beginning on February 21.

"A private member's Bill will give my colleagues in the Assembly the opportunity to exercise a conscience vote on this matter," he said. "If the parliament agrees to this reform, the Northern Territory will be the first place in Australia to legislate for voluntary euthanasia."

Mr Perron said under his proposal:

- the patient must be terminally ill
- the patient must be an adult
- the patient must be mentally competent
- the patient must ask in writing for assistance to hasten death
- life shortening medication will be either self administered or done with medical assistance
- medical staff who assist the patient will not face any legal sanction.

"If there are terminally ill patients who wish to end their suffering by accelerating inevitable death, and there are sympathetic doctors who are willing to assist them die with dignity, then the law should not forbid it," he said.

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"The law should also protect the right of doctors to decline to assist such patients. My proposal gives them that protection."

Mr Perron said legal reform for the terminally ill was long overdue.

He said he recognised there would be a wide diversity of views in the community on the issue.

"That too will be true of my 24 Assembly colleagues. This is not a party issue nor is it political. It is absolutely about providing those who face sure death the right to choose when they die."

Mr Perron said he did not expect passage of the legislation would lead to widespread demands for its use.

"The will to live is strong. Patients will hang on while their quality of life is acceptable but the pain and distress of terminal illness is such that the patient should have the right to let go at the time of their choice.

"The law as it now stands forbids that and places doctors at risk of litigation."

"This proposal would end this anachronistic situation, conferring a right on terminally ill patients that they presently don't have and protecting doctors at the same time."

Mr Perron stressed that his draft Bill contained tight provisions to ensure a patient's right was respected but included the requirement for a second medical opinion as to the state of health and mind of the patient.

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