



END-OF-LIFE CHOICE SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – AGM 16 JUNE 2018 AUCKLAND

Kiaora koutou katoa.

I am proud to be presenting the first President's Report of the End-of-Life Choice Society. Last year we were on the cusp of changing our name and this June we have completed a year under our new title. There is no doubt, despite our name change, that people know what we stand for!

First, as before, I would like to thank our wonderful office holders for their continued and sterling efforts in what has been a busy and active 12 month period. Jack Havill, who rejoined the National Committee as a co-opted member, and Carole Sweney, as Secretary, have continued to be a source of wisdom, experience and common sense for me. Mary Panko, as Vice-President, has stepped in for me on more than one occasion and represents us formidably along with the Auckland branch, in this region. Pete Cowley wrestles with banks, Xero and our finances to produce accounts we can understand and transparent systems which allow us to track income and expenditure easily. Elizabeth Cronje maintains our membership records and gives us names of lapsed members to follow up and we are grateful to her for that work.

Our National Committee has seen some changes to its composition and we thank Olive Mitchell (Kapiti-Horowhenua Branch) and Sue Reynolds and Jono Spink (Bay of Plenty Branch) for their tireless work as Branch Representatives, as they exit the National Committee. To replace them, we welcome Linda Kennington and Esther Richards as Branch representatives of Kapiti-Horowhenua and Bay of Plenty respectively. It is important that people are able to take a break from this work as and when they need to, and that we have others willing to step up to fill their places. That is a sign of a vibrant and committed organisation.

The last year has seen some extraordinary developments. At the last AGM, we noted that David Seymour's End of Life Choice bill had just been drawn from the Parliamentary ballot. In December of last year, that bill passed its first reading by 76 votes to 44. This is further than we have got on the last two occasions when such a bill has been in front of Parliament.

Jack Havill, Carole Sweney and I presented the EOLC submission to the select committee on Monday 21 May. A copy of that submission is available from your Branch Representative or local National Committee member, or through Pete Cowley, our Administrator.

We are aware that Numbers of MPs, especially new MPs who were suddenly and very early in their Parliamentary career, confronted with the challenge of a conscience vote, voted for the bill at first reading in order to get some breathing time to find out how their electorate felt, and gather their own thoughts and feelings on the issue. That is why we are not taking anything for granted and we are pursuing MPs relentlessly to persuade them to support it at second reading.

A significant curved ball has been thrown into our campaign by the extension of time for the Justice Select Committee to hear submissions. They have had their report back date extended from the end of September this year to the end of March next year. That is a six month extension to hear the 3500 of the 35,000 submitters. That is a record number of submitters. 3500 is the number who have asked to be heard in person and the committee is bound to do that AND compile a report before the end of March 2019.

We must consider closely how this impacts our campaign. We will need to engage in significant fundraising activities in order to keep our campaign going. We currently have a campaign website running in addition to our organisational website. That website is www.yestodignity.org.nz and it is constantly updated, monitored and posting new videos and material. But new material for the website and tactics for publicity will be required over a longer period than we thought.

It would be remiss to present an annual report without mentioning either the result of our complaint about the Police action over Operation Painter and the illegal breath testing stop set up by the Police to detain people who had attended an Exit meeting, and the trial of Suzy Austen for aiding and abetting a suicide and importing a banned narcotic substance.

I wrote to the Police Commissioner on behalf of the people who were stopped and whose houses were searched as a result of the illegal breath testing stop in October 2016. Some of those people were our members who support a law change as we do. We have just recently received a reply from the Police Commissioner which offers nothing in response, except meeting with the affected people, even though they recognise that the Police actions were illegal, as stated by the IPCA report finally released recently for her trial in the case of the death of Annemarie Treadwell, Suzy Austen was acquitted of aiding and abetting a suicide (which carries a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment) but was convicted of importing a banned drug (Nembutal). Suzy's trial reinforced the need for a law change, so that people were not compelled to engage in illegal activity in order to get the kind of death they chose.

The call for a law change is louder than ever. Our polling this year of both the general public and doctors in particular shows that not only is our support still sitting at three quarters of the population, but that one third of doctors who responded are in favour of a law change. We will not get more support from them UNTIL there is a law change. Then they will be free to express themselves honestly without opprobrium from their profession.

We have more to do as we guide this bill through its second and third readings. But it is still entirely feasible that we will see a law change by this time next year. Please continue your support at this crucial time as we press on for a law change.



MARYAN STREET
PRESIDENT, EOLC Society NZ (Inc)