



# End-Of-Life Choice Newsletter

Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand, Inc.

[www.ves.org.nz](http://www.ves.org.nz)

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Issue 24

## In This Issue:

**End-Of-Life Choice Bill Is In Ballot Box!**

**A tribute to Janet Marsland, 1934-2012**

**Interview with new VESNZ President, Ms. Carole Sweney at the International World Conference.**

## **Branch Updates**

**Now is the time to contact your Local MP and tell him or her that you support your right to a death that reflects your values and beliefs.**

**Letter Writing Campaign to support the End-Of-Life Choice Bill is now underway.**

**Contact Yvonne Shaw at [vesnz.yvonne@gmail.com](mailto:vesnz.yvonne@gmail.com) to find out how you can take part in outreach events and planning.**

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## VESNZ Grieves Loss Of Leader

VESNZ lost a leader and individual rights advocate in June, with the death of Janet Marsland. Janet, interim Chair of the National Committee, died June 23rd, just days after being diagnosed with end stage pancreatic cancer.

Janet made her opinions on life-prolonging treatment known to medical practitioners and hospice care providers until the very end.

“There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that she did not want to be kept alive in hospital,” said friend Sue Wilkins. “She made it clear that she wanted to go home and, with her friends, she arranged a support network to help care for her.”

Unfortunately, Janet was not able to return home because her condition deteriorated too fast to make that practicable.

Instead, She agreed to be admitted to Te Omanga Hospice where she received palliative care. Janet was a volunteer with the Wellington Citizen’s Advice Bureau and a member of Exit International, an end-of-life rights advocacy group.



**Janet Marsland, 1934-2012**

## End-Of-Life Choice Bill - ready for discussion

Labour MP Maryan Street’s End-Of-Life Choice Bill was not one of five drawn from 63 proposed private members’ pieces of legislation in the ballot which took place on July 26. However, completion of the Bill means we can now start discussions about it.

Meanwhile, it remains a live document on the website: (See below) where it can be downloaded and is available for comment.

[http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Legislation/ProposedBills/0/5/5/50HOH\\_MEMBERBILL090\\_1-End-of-Life-Choice-Bill.htm](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Legislation/ProposedBills/0/5/5/50HOH_MEMBERBILL090_1-End-of-Life-Choice-Bill.htm)

**VESNZ members are urged to write to their MPs**, drawing their attention to the proposed Bill and seeking their support. You can contact your MP on the website or by letter – remember you do

not have to put a stamp on letters mailed to your representative in parliament.

It was disappointing that Maryan Street’s Bill did not get the luck of the draw this time but there will be further opportunities and it is vital we keep the issue alive with parliamentarians and the general public.

The bill defines the details around administration and implementation of a law to allow medical practitioners to prescribe an appropriate amount of drugs to their terminally-ill patients who request it. The law requires at least two medical practitioners to participate in the process, a request process for patients, and protection from prosecution for family members.

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## A message from the President



Ms. Carole Sweney,  
President,  
End-Of-Life Choice

*As the new President, I'd like to acknowledge past Presidents and committees who have kept the Society focused on our aim to promote legislation allowing assisted dying in New Zealand.*

*The Society was formed by members of the Humanists and Rationalists Societies over 30 years ago. Two Societies were formed, in Auckland and in Wellington. They merged in 2004.*

*As a national group we have been able to draw on our members from around the country for ideas, abilities and time. Now, with the backing of the Hon. Maryan Street, MP, the new law is imminent and we find a need to bring in the professionals to assist us.*

*We'll be increasing our fundraising to enable this to happen. As usual, most of the work will be done by volunteers but the burden on those shoulders won't be so great because we have now hired our first employee. It would have been wonderful to have Janet still leading this year's activities but the new committee will carry on and follow the plans that had been outlined.*

*So, a big Thank You to the outgoing National Committee members - Heather Westerkamp, Noel Simpson, Beverley Hurrelle, Mabel Smith, Jack Jones, Pat Hubbard and Alastair Hubbard. We know we have your support as we enter a new phase of activity.*

*And Welcome to new members - **James Armour, Jan Rosie, Kevin Stone, Des Vize, John Valentine, Libby Smales, and Sara Heslop.***

*More about the new committee members in the next issue.*

*Also, welcome to **Yvonne Shaw** from Oregon, who will spend a year with us helping to get our communication systems robust and effective. Her experience will be invaluable.*

*Carole Sweney*

*End-Of-Life Choice  
campaign relies on your  
contributions.*

*Contribute to your local  
branch or go online to  
[ves.org.nz](http://ves.org.nz).*

*Funding assists in  
promoting legalising  
options at end-of-life,  
and forwards your civil  
liberties.*

## VESNZ President attends World Federation of Right-To-Die Conference in Switzerland

People all around the world recognise that Aid-In-Dying is a human rights issue which needs to be debated, according to VESNZ President Ms. Carole Sweney.

Carole attended the WFRTD Conference in Switzerland in June. She found that NZ is ahead of many countries in recognizing the need for legislation.

"There's a lot of resistance from various powerful influences. But supporters still strongly believe this is the right thing to do."

"New Zealand has been a leader in social change - votes for women, abortion and homosexual law reform

and nuclear-free legislation - we can lead in this area of human rights as well. We don't shy away from the seemingly impossible," she said.

Carole met with dedicated, compassionate people finding ways to make the end of life much more in tune with the values of individuals. Those from countries that already have legislation are working to enhance support groups.

Innovative people are designing devices that will assist those who want to take their own lives in a gentler, less -traumatic way. Many had personal experience of the assisted dying situation and were prepared to stand up for their beliefs.

## VESNZ Campaign Named 'End-Of-Life Choice'

End-Of-Life Choice is the name of the recent campaign to change end-of-life laws in New Zealand. It reflects the respect of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand for all options at end of life. It also mirrors the title of the legislative bill in Parliament.

VESNZ members recognized the need to create a media presence that embraces civil liberties. VESNZ leaders responded by addressing the issue at a goal-setting conference in February. After a thoughtful debate, National Committee members, led by Janet Marsland, defined End-Of-Life Choice as a title that defines the values of the Society.

Parliamentary leaders quickly embraced the new name. In early phases of the draft bill, Labour MP

Hon. Maryan Street expressed a need for a title that would differentiate this attempt from past efforts.

"Let's not call it Death with Dignity," she said at a legislative committee meeting, "We need to break away from past (law change) attempts." Maryan has named her bill "End-Of-Life Choice."

The End-Of-Life Choice campaign will continue until the bill is pulled from the ballot box and goes to Select Committee. The new banner will identify newsletters, outreach materials, brochures and other media. The official incorporated name will remain Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand Inc, for legal and reporting purposes.

**Show your support for End-Of-Life Choice by writing to your MP. The letter insert in this issue can be used to inspire your own letter to Parliament or a local newspaper.**

**Share your story and make a difference.**

### A Message from Rev. John Murray, Chair, Kapiti-Horowhenua

The National Committee records its great loss in the sudden death of Janet Marsland. For most of the past year, Janet has been our leader as Acting Chairperson, giving insightful and energetic impetus to our work for the whole Society through our National Committee. She has been a forthright public speaker on our behalf on many occasions.

She died at the very time that our Society was holding its Annual Meeting, when her chairperson's annual report was being read. We note too that Janet will be greatly missed by the Wellington Branch, which she also chaired. Janet was passionately committed to

achieving our goal of law change and the right to receive assisted dying - and equally committed to such matters as updating the Constitution and arranging all the petty details of postal voting!

In whatever cause, Janet has, through her planning ability, risen to positions of responsibility which she has carried out with great attention to detail.

In a message which was to have been taken to Janet from the AGM, we thanked her for her indefatigable leadership. We now say that again. We will miss her very much in the busyness of our work for law change.

### 'End-Of-Life Choice' Bill *(continued from Page 1)*

The proposed legislation is similar to laws in other countries. However it includes an End-Of-Life Directive, which allows those who are mentally competent to define the quality of life parameters they consider relevant in case they should become mentally incompetent through either disease or disability.

The directive allows those with a debilitating disease like Alzheimer's to access the law through a medical appointee. Participants must update their directive at least every five years, while mentally competent, and can change the directive at any time. Administration of the effective dose can be either through injection with the assistance of a medical practitioner, or orally.

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## Calendar of Events:

**Maryan Street will speak to The Wellington Branch  
spring meeting on Saturday October 27, 2 pm  
at the Senior Centre at the Public Library.**

**Waikato Branch Meetings  
are the last Sunday of each month  
at 2 - 4pm at St Andrews Library,  
Braid St, St Andrews, Hamilton**

## Around The World:

- We are not alone - the end-of-life choice debate is alive overseas. After spending a week in a home for dementia sufferers for a documentary, star BBC newsman John Simpson, 67, said: *"If we're not allowed to make our own decisions about our own lives, well I'm not sure it's a life worth living anyway."*
- The Observer newspaper featured stroke victim Tony Nicklinson's court fight to end his life and ran an editorial headed: *"When the right to die is the humane choice."*
- A Canadian judge ruled that a doctor should be able to help an incapably ill woman to end her life and significantly said there was no evidence that physician-assisted death in the Netherlands and Oregon "has imposed a particular risk to socially vulnerable populations".

## Branch News and Events

**Auckland:** AGM was July 20. Labour MP Maryan Street attended to discuss the new End-Of-Life Choice bill that has gone into the ballot box. Officers elected: Chair: Alastair Hubbard; Secretary: Rosie Kaplan; National Rep: Sara Hislop

**Hawkes Bay:** Membership has grown to 50. There is a new "ad hoc" committee. Helen Yensen brings an amazing source of knowledge, and how fortunate we are to have Libby Smales from the national committee. To date this year we have had a visit from Yvonne Shaw at a well attended public meeting, a showing of "How to Die In Oregon", and a members meeting with good attendance. The committee has met twice and organized two functions in the next two months. Local members extend to Yvonne Shaw a very warm welcome, and stay.

**Kapiti-Horowhenua:** Membership has risen from an initial 67 to a total of 127. The focus of Branch activities over the next two or three months is to increase membership and promote a widespread understanding of reasons for law change. Each Local area will hold house meetings. In the informal setting of our homes, it is easier to get to know each other and to discuss our aims and ask the questions we always wanted to ask. Chair: John Murray; Secretary: Carole Sweney; Treasurer: Ian Wilson

**Waikato:** Branch meetings are the last Sunday of each month at 2 - 4pm at St Andrews Library, Braid St, St Andrews, Hamilton. Election results from AGM: Chairman Don Sandford; Secretary Jack Havill; Treasurer: Elizabeth Morine; National Rep: Jack Havill

**Wellington:** The branch met July at the Wellington Library. Elected were: Chair: Pat Hubbard; Membership Secretary: Lorna Lovegrove; Treasurer: Suzy Austen; The meeting included a video interview of Sean Davison, and introduction of incoming President, Carole Sweney.