**Victorian Council of Churches Condemn Lack of Consultation on Euthanasia Bill**

# In an extraordinary move today a majority of churches in Victoria have issued a joint statement condemning the Andrews Government’s euthanasia legislation. ·

The State Government of Victoria intends to introduce “End of Life” legislation in the spring session of Parliament and the churches, through the Victorian Council of Churches (VCC), are calling for widespread community debate and discussion. “There are far-reaching consequences of such legislation” said Bishop Peter Danaher, the President of VCC.

“We call for open and frank discussion across the whole community about all aspects of death and dying. There is a wide range of views and interpretations about end of life” he said.

Though recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows a decline in faith and religion, approximately 68% of Victorians still claim some form of belief. Consultation on the actual Bill to be presented to Parliament has been limited and the churches are far from confident that the views of all members of society have been heard and taken into consideration. ·

The churches assert that euthanasia, the deliberate talking of the life of a terminally ill person in order to bring that person's suffering to an end, should not be legalised in Victoria.

Since 19881, patients in Victoria have had the right to refuse life-sustaining treatment. The churches played a constructive role in the development of that legislation and they believe they should play a similar role in preserving its integrity.

The churches understand that many Victorians want to uphold the current legislation which affirms that life should be preserved rather than destroyed and which also supports the common law right of any individual to refuse medical treatment in certain circumstances.

They also assert that consistent, universally available, high quality palliative care is the gold standard for end of life management. “Dying at our place of choice with the people we choose and with the religious and cultural practices of our choice are all important factors” said Bishop Danaher.

“We claim inclusivity to be a hallmark of Victoria, but this legislation threatens the cultural sensitivities of so many. We have to allow end of life to occur with maximum respect and dignity”.

The churches are calling on state politicians not to pass this legislation.

1. By virtue of the Medical Treatment Act (1988)