

Senators still wrestling with the issue of Euthanasia.

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) panel believes it was afforded the opportunity to present and expand on the key arguments underpinning the Church's opposition to Euthanasia at its session before the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee Hearing into the Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996 today.

The ACBC panel was headed by Archbishop Barry Hickey as the representative of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. He was supported by: Dr Warwick Neville, Research Officer at the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference Secretariat; Rev Dr Anthony Fisher, Lecturer in Law and Ethics at the Australian Catholic University; and Dr Margherita Nicoletti, Medical Officer at the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Hospice.

"My initial reaction from the Hearing was to feel that the Senators, as a group, were still wrestling with the question (euthanasia)," said the Archbishop. "I believe that they were very open to hearing the various points of view and very open to hearing the Church's view".

The Senate Committee questioned the ACBC Panel on the issue of palliative care, particularly the concept that palliative care treatment goes beyond purely physical alleviation of pain to that of the emotional and spiritual pain that an individual may be suffering. It also appeared very interested in the Church's statements that palliative care services in Australia do not meet the current demands required by society.

"The main message that I would like to believe was made clear to the Committee today is that Euthanasia breaches the principle behind our current laws that life is to be protected," said Archbishop Hickey. "Any breach would open the way to an extension of the other principle of utility. If life can be taken in a few restricted instances what is to stop it being taken away in greater numbers some time in the future?"