
Decriminalisation Of Abortion In Australia

The recent decriminalisation of abortion in New South Wales (NSW) has received remarkable reactions. After more than 70 hours of debate, the NSW parliament overturned the prehistoric 119-year-old anti-abortion law (Australian Associated Press, 2019). Why has this archaic, degrading and cruel law taken so long to be addressed and why are many Australians against abortion?

Presumably, this law remained in place due to public rallies and articles published and held by Australian politicians such as Barnaby Joyce and Tony Abbot who fought tooth and nail to keep the criminalisation in place.

Australian politician and former Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, is strongly anti-abortion. In his speech during parliament, Mr Joyce argued his second son to partner, Vikki Campion, Tom, was alive well before he was born and that the push to decriminalise abortion in NSW belittled him as a 'sub-human. 'Inside the womb, Tom kicked, punched, grabbed his umbilical cord, felt pain, slept and dreamed - to say he didn't have the rights of other human life is to say he must be sub-human,' Mr Joyce said. Yes, this speech is heartfelt but it also revealed that as a politician, he is incapable of walking in someone else's shoes. The current laws allow termination to occur up to 22 weeks of pregnancy and thereafter with the consent of two doctors if they believe the pregnancy is a risk to a woman's physical or mental health as well as their social circumstances (McGowan, 2019). The first factor that Mr Joyce is incorrect on, and that needs to be pointed out is that according to Dr Anne Davis, an OB/GYN and the consulting medical director for Physicians for Reproductive Health, that there is no evidence of brain activity that suggests that a foetus is conscious and would feel pain until around 30 weeks (Miller, 2016). This is well after the 22 weeks after which consent is necessary. Furthermore, statistics show that most women in Australia have abortions before 14 weeks (Heath, 2019). At this point of gestation, the foetus has similar cognitive activity to that of a sea slug with no scientific evidence of self-awareness and is more like a "reflex-bound hunk of sensory-motor processes that do not respond to anything in a directed, purposeful way" (Gazzaniga, 2005). If a woman receives an abortion before 14 weeks, the foetus has the same electrical brain activity as a clinically brain-dead patient and less activity than a shrimp's nervous system (Gazzaniga, 2005). Even so, this bill adds a layer of regulation by requiring the approval of two doctors after 22 weeks. Beyond that, abortions after 22 weeks are extremely rare – in 2018 the Queensland Law Reform Commission found that only 1% to 3% of abortions in Australia occur after 20 weeks – and most occur as a result of severe foetal abnormality. "Some severe foetal conditions only present at the routine 18-to-20 week ultrasound, and often require further testing," Melanie Fernandez, the co-founder of the NSW Pro-choice Alliance said. "For women in regional and remote areas, these tests can be delayed, which means they are pushed further into their time," she said. "For women in poverty, the ultrasound that happens at 20 weeks is the first opportunity they have to free access to a chromosomal abnormality scan (McGowan, 2019)."

Tony Abbott also attended the rally that opposed abortion decriminalisation. He decried that abortion was 'effectively infanticide on demand'. Abortion and murder are not the same things. Pro-lifers such as Mr Abbot and Mr Joyce repeatedly refer to abortion as the murder of an

innocent and non-threatening life form that deserves to live a life full of endless possibilities. Yes, people do have a right to live but they definitely do not have the right to live inside our bodies especially when it poses a threat to our physical or mental health. A foetus possesses a woman's body and incubates inside her for 9 months. In this modern age, people are not even allowed inside our houses or within our property without our consent. The laws within Australia stipulates that it is completely legal to remove a person committing any such criminal trespass, and the conduct is a reasonable response in the circumstances as he or she perceives them. Therefore, self-defence is a reasonable justification when defending in court against charges of causing bodily harm or death (Lui, 2018). Keep in mind that in the case of pregnancy there is a 95% chance that the intruder will cause immense pain to you. To these anti-abortionists, a foetus's life is full of what-ifs and imaginary futures. What if they became the future PM of Australia? What if they created the cure for cancer? What if they invented the next greatest technological advancement? No one stops to consider the life of the woman. She is not innocent. She has made a mistake and needs to deal with the consequences. Maybe she skipped her pill or does not utilise it in the first place or maybe she is a young and senseless girl who didn't use protection in the first place. It's her mistake and she should deal with it right?... Wrong! Firstly, the future life of the woman is at stake too. She too could cure cancer, become the future prime minister or invent the next new Apple alternative. Yet her future is supposedly not worth as much as the small peanut-sized foetus embedded in her womb. She will be sent to jail if she tries to remove the foetus. Where is the sense in that? Secondly, contraceptive methods are never 100% effective. Typical use of the most common contraceptives shows that condoms are only 85% effective and the use of combined oral contraceptive (aka the pill) is only 92% effective etc. (New Zealand Family Planning, 2014). As a result, '30% of people on the pill will have an unintended pregnancy in five years (Paxman, 2017)'. Thirdly, in many cases, the woman does not know they are pregnant until the later stages of pregnancy. Fourthly, according to Holly Brennan (manager of CBC), most women who opt for second to third-trimester abortions are dealing with an array of health issues like domestic violence, mental illness and homelessness (Heath N., 2019). Some women become pregnant after non-consensual sex, while others are victims of reproductive coercion, or contraceptive sabotage (Heath N., 2019). Can you imagine if you, your sister, your mother, your aunt or any close female companion of a relative were raped and was forced to keep the child? Can you imagine what immense psychological and physical trauma that would cause? The fact that any human would force a woman to give birth against her wishes is beyond cruel and despicable.

There is a difference between carrying a foetus to term happily and is an act of the most profound and generous love that requires great thought as it entails pain and sacrifice. That should never be forced on anyone. Abortion should be treated as a health matter, not as a criminal matter. Your womb is yours.