

A-G's office threatens Nitschke, aka the candidate

Crikey

15 October 2007

Greg Barnes

Greg Barnes writes: Philip Ruddock is a hands on sort of guy. He is the type of minister who, shall we say, likes to be kept informed of politically sensitive activities that his officers in the Attorney-General's Department undertake from time to time. So don't believe for a minute that he was unaware, as he claimed on ABC Radio yesterday, that Barbara Vosoba from his department had written to euthanasia campaigner and independent candidate for the seat of Menzies in Melbourne's north east, to threaten Dr Nitschke about an information workshop he is proposing to hold tomorrow.

Dr Nitschke you see is taking on Kevin Andrews, who abhors euthanasia and who has recently become the Howard government's xenophobia expert with his unwarranted attacks on African refugees. The letter, received late 4.30pm on Friday from Ms Vosoba who calls herself "Coordinator, Community Liaison Scheme" (where do they get these ridiculous titles?), tells Dr Nitschke that her officers have checked his Exit International website and think that Dr Nitschke might be in breach of the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) (Enforcement) Act if copies of Exit International's Peaceful Pill Handbook are sold at the workshop. The Peaceful Pill Handbook is a useful guide to the ethics and medical issues surrounding dying with dignity. It is of course banned in Australia. Crikey today has a copy of Ms Vosoba's letter in full:

12 October 2007 Dr Philip Nitschke Director Exit International PO Box 37781 DARWIN NT 0821 Dear Dr Nitschke Exit Workshops The Community Liaison Scheme (CLS), located within the Attorney-General's Department, is a joint Australian Government, State and Territory Government initiative which provides information to publishers, distributors, exhibitors and retailers and members of the public about their obligations under the national classification scheme. As part of this role, CLS officers conduct checks at outlets across Australia where films, computer games and certain publications are advertised, exhibited, hired or sold and also check websites in order to monitor compliance with classification laws. I refer to the website www.exitinternational.net which states in the section on the Exit Workshops that "Workshops are supplemented by The Peaceful Pill Handbook (banned in Australia...". According to the website, workshops are to be held on 16 and 30 October in Melbourne. Under the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) (Enforcement) Act 1995 (Vic), a person must not sell or deliver a publication classified RC (maximum penalty of \$26,400 or imprisonment for 2 years). Further, a person must not possess or copy a publication classified RC with the intention of selling the publication or copy (section 31). "Sell" is defined to include exchange, let on hire, offer or display for sale or exchange etc. On 24 February 2007, the Classification Review Board classified the publication The Peaceful Pill Handbook RC (Refused Classification). I wish to draw your attention to these offence provisions as the workshops may be potentially in breach of the Act. I further note media reports that a film Single Shot is screened at the workshops. We have no record of this film being classified. Under the Act, a person must not exhibit in a public place or sell an

unclassified film (sections 6 and 15) (unless the film is exempt from classification).
Once again, the workshops may be potentially in breach of classification laws.

Please note, that a copy of this letter has been provided to Victoria Police and as similar provisions exist in classification enforcement legislation in all other jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies in all jurisdictions have been provided with a copy of this letter. Yours sincerely Barbara Vosoba Coordinator Community Liaison Scheme

Cc Classification Enforcement Contact, relevant State and Territory law enforcement agency.

Ms Vosoba says she is concerned about media reports she has read or heard which suggest that Single Shot, a five minute film on the topic, is going to be screened. Don't do it, Ms Vosoba warns Dr Nitschke, because the film hasn't been classified.

Bit late for that, Ms Vosoba, it's been downloaded by thousands of people around the world since it was uploaded on to YouTube a month ago and it has had public screenings in Queensland, according to The Courier-Mail in a report on 22 September.

Ominously, Ms Vosoba concludes her letter to Dr Nitschke by noting that she has sent her letter to the Victorian Police in other words you might get raided and arrested Philip. How curious that the Attorney-General's Department should see fit to send this threatening letter to Dr Nitschke in the context of an election campaign. The Department has known about the film since at least September 22 when the YouTube launch was held. And the Exit International website has been advertising the Peaceful Pill Handbook for months.

For the record, Exit International says it is not selling the Peaceful Pill Handbook at the workshop. And Mr Ruddock says he didn't know about Ms Vosoba's actions on Friday yeh, sure!