MEDIA RELEASE

Incident at Melbourne International Airport

Euthanasia records accessed

At approx 10am as Exit International director Dr Philip Nitschke and Dr Fiona Stewart passed through customs and border protection to board Qantas QF93 to Los Angeles, they were taken out of the queue by customs officers.

Passports were taken, along with mobile phones, iPad, Kindle, laptop computers. The only information provided was that this was a "random" inspection and search. Customs officers said they were checking to see that cash of over $10,000 was not being taken from the country. The confiscation of the phones was to "see they were not stolen". The laptop computers to see that there was "no child pornography". No other explanation was offered.

Passwords for phone and laptop were demanded. When Dr Nitschke objected he was accused of being uncooperative and told that any obstruction would result in him and Dr Stewart being taken to separate rooms. At this point, QF 93 began boarding.

After 45 minutes, customs officers returned to the interrogation room with the phones and laptops, and we were told we could leave. No documentation was provided to explain their extraordinary actions, and when Dr Stewart asked for the names of the customs officers involved, she was told this need not be provided. On persisting, asking to see identification badges etc, she was told the information could be provided but it would take some time and to insist would mean the flight would be missed.

Nitschke and Stewart were the last to board the flight, with Qantas staff saying they were waiting to see if we would be travelling.

The provision of passwords for the confiscated computers gave customs officers access to confidential medical records, details of patients seeking euthanasia, and some 30,000 Exit International records.

END. 21st January 2014

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