



# Media Release

## *NZ Ministry of Health decision applauded*

The news today that the NZ Minister of Health has rejected the NZ Medical Council's recommendation to prosecute Exit International director Dr Philip Nitschke was today welcomed by Dr Nitschke of Exit International and his counterpart Mr Jack Jones in Auckland.

"The decision is a victory for common sense", said Dr Nitschke speaking from Darwin. "To suggest that conducting workshops on end of life issues for well elderly Exit members, is akin to practicing medicine, as has been the allegation of Council Chairman John Campbell, is ridiculous. More importantly this attempt to close down discussion on end of life choices not only seriously disadvantages elderly New Zealanders' right to information but it unfairly and selectively targets our organisation".

In February 2006, the Medical Council ruled that Nitschke had practiced medicine illegally and referred the matter to the Minister for Health. At that time The Council defended its decision, arguing that it took a very broad view of what constituted "practicing medicine". The Council claimed Philip Nitschke had used knowledge gained in his medical training to run workshops where he advised people how to die and that there were issues of public safety. Chairman John Campbell conceded that not every doctor visiting New Zealand and holding lectures or workshops was forced to seek medical registration.

Dr Nitschke said that Exit workshops were about the provision of end of life information and that this was not advice to people on how to suicide. According to Nitschke, this case goes to the very heart of the question of a person's right to access end of life information. "Accurate information empowers people and allows rational choice and this knowledge should certainly not be the exclusive preserve of medical doctors" said Nitschke.

"Exit workshops are run jointly between myself and medical sociologist Dr Fiona Stewart" he said. "The medical profession has no right to decide what is and is not medicine in this way. No inquiry was held into Dr Stewart's role in the workshops and lectures, this is simply because the Council has no jurisdiction over her and her profession".

"In NZ in January we ran the biggest workshops we have ever held. The medical profession should acknowledge that demand for end of life information is growing and that people come to Exit precisely because they cannot obtain answers elsewhere. There is no place for censorship on such an important issue".

Dr Nitschke said this very expensive exercise by the Medical Council and one which had not been in the best interests of New Zealanders. He urged the Council to look closely at the criteria used to launch such an investigation so that such unnecessary incidents can be avoided.

Dr Nitschke plans to return to New Zealand in the near future to complete the series of end of life workshops that was begun in January.

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