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## #CINEMAFORTHESENSES BYRON BAY FILM FESTIVAL 6-15 OCTOBER 2017

### Film preview: *Fade to Black* CEO's battle for a dignified death

The fight for voluntary euthanasia in Australia has been a long and laborious matter: effecting change was even beyond the best efforts of a resourceful and dynamic corporate executive, who died frustrated.

His story is told in the feature documentary *Fade to Black*, screening at the **2017 Byron Bay Film Festival**.

**Peter Short** was the hard-driving CEO of **Shell Coles Express** in Australia, a \$6 billion-a-year business with more than 5,000 employees.

On his 57th birthday he was diagnosed with terminal oesophageal cancer and told he was likely to die within nine months. Peter was a man used to being in charge, and faced with the likelihood of a painful and undignified death, he decided to exercise some control in that too.

Violent suicide is ruled out, so he tries to source the lethal and illegal drug Nembutal, favoured by end-of-life practitioners in Europe.

Peter comes across **Dr Rodney Syme**, a 79-year-old who operates outside of the law, supplying Nembutal and providing advice to dying or suffering patients.

A man of action right up until the last days, Peter dedicated himself to sparking a national debate about voluntary euthanasia in Australia.

He teamed up with Dr Syme, Greens Senator **Richard Di Natale** and other well-known profile euthanasia advocates to introduce an assisted dying law in Australia but is soon frustrated by the pace of change. More than 28 assisted dying bills have been introduced and failed in Australia over the past two decades, and this latest attempt will likely become the 29th failed attempt.

His proposal is met with loud and sustained opposition from religious groups who argue that allowing suffering people to end their own lives will lead to widespread abuse and social breakdown.

When he meets an 80-year-old former school teacher who wants to die not because she is terminally ill, but because she is lonely and believes her life has run its course, his own views are challenged. Where does the line get drawn?

The debate becomes even murkier with the views of **Dr Philip Nitschke**, he first person to legally help a patient die under a short lived voluntary euthanasia law in the Northern Territory.

Twenty years on, Nitschke's views have become too extreme for many advocates of voluntary euthanasia, and some blame them for the continued failure for laws to pass in Australia.

Peter tries to get a meeting with then Prime Minister **Tony Abbot**. He thinks that if he can personally appeal to the highest lawmaker in the land he might increase the chances of a law passing. After months of trying, he finally receives a phone call, but is left disappointed with his response.

As Peter's health declines he is faced with the harrowing decision about whether to die naturally or end his own life with the Nembutal he had acquired months earlier.

While following Peter's story, the film explores the issue of assisted dying from every angle with the perspective of major political, media and social figures in Australia.

***Fade to Black* is screening twice at the Byron Bay Film Festival: at the Regent in Murwillumbah on Saturday, October 14 at 6pm, and at the Byron Community Centre on Sunday, October 15 at 11.30am. Tickets on sale now via [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)**

## **THE FESTIVAL**

The Byron Bay Film Festival is illuminated with two dazzling red carpet gala events in the heart of town. Opening Night offers a chance for industry networking and a taste of the flavour of the festival to come, and features a highlight film screening. The culminating celebration event is an exciting night of recognition for filmmakers, the festival, Byron Bay, and the international film industry, and not to be missed. Early ticket purchases are recommended to avoid disappointment to these two popular events.

The 11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival is held on Friday 6 – Sunday 15 October 2017 in multiple venues throughout Byron Bay and surrounding suburbs.

Program is OUT NOW.

**Tickets are on sale now via [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)**

**End.**

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