Our final footprint

Dying simply and sustainably in Tasmania
Why read this guide?

Dying as you lived
Perhaps you have diligently recycled and re-used all your life and thought about your carbon footprint when choosing where to holiday and whether to drive or walk to the shop. Perhaps you have made your house energy efficient, composted the food scraps and happily grown some of your own food.

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.
MAHATMA GANDHI

Have you ever wondered what is legal?
Perhaps you’ve thought of a cardboard coffin or making your own, or a shroud. This guide will help you to decipher the law and assist you in contacting those responsible.

Decision-making time
Do you wish to be buried in a national park or reserve, in your garden, at sea or have your ashes strewn over your favourite park, lake or mountain? This guide will help to simplify your decision-making.

And a funeral? Do you need one? If so, how do you make it meaningful, while cutting costs, both financial and environmental? What is your legacy and how do you best facilitate your wishes? Perhaps there are options you’ve never thought of.

Did you know?
Over 80% of Tasmanians choose cremation over burial.

Did you know?
Most metals such as mercury in the body will disintegrate in the crematorium causing additional air pollution, though Tasmanian crematoria must meet stringent pollution standards. Stainless steel and titanium are usually recovered from the body’s ashes and may be recycled.

If you have ever thought about living more simply, more sustainably and having a smaller ecological footprint on this planet, this guide is for you. It will help you to navigate the most ecologically sustainable burial and funeral options in Tasmania, enabling you to die as you lived – leaving a simpler, smaller final footprint on the Earth.
The importance of planning

We spend months planning for all the other major events in our lives, like births, marriages, home buying, but are reluctant to plan for our death. It’s confronting. But planning for death will enable us to die as we lived and will help people to remember us for the things we want to be remembered for. It will also help to simplify the whole dying and death process, ultimately making it easier for loved ones.

Some tips to help:

1. Talk to funeral directors. Write down wishes for the kind of burial or cremation you want. How do you want to be remembered - a wake, a picnic, a tree, a seat….? Give your written wishes to someone you trust or who has enduring power of attorney.

2. Be as specific as possible. This guide will help you with those choices.

3. Ensure that if you want your organs or body donated, you complete the relevant forms and carry the donor card/s with you.

4. Make an emotional and financial will and talk to your loved ones about it.

My emotional will

Let me leave you the things I have loved. Here is my favourite family recipe: .................................................................

I really loved this book. I think you’ll enjoy it. .................................................................

This is my favourite piece of music. Think of me when you hear it. .................................................................

I really treasure this memory of our time together and these photos. .................................................................

I remember seeing this film and loving it. .................................................................

Did you know?

You may choose not to have a funeral.
Making a gift of your organs

Through donating your organs and tissue you can transform the lives of ten or more people. In the special circumstances of being declared brain dead, your organs can be a gift of life. Your organs will be considered no matter your age. Your funeral would take place after the donation.

An organisation called DonateLife working in conjunction with the major public hospitals, is responsible for the coordination of organ and tissue donation in Tasmania.

Around 1500 people are on Australian organ transplant waiting lists at any time. The most common need is for kidney transplants followed by liver and lung transplants. Heart, pancreas and skin tissue are also in demand.

You can specify what you agree to donate when you register.

For more information go to www.donatelife.gov.au.

Donating your body for medical research

The University of Tasmania Faculty of Health runs a body bequest program through which people can donate their bodies to be used for the teaching of human anatomy for medical and health professionals.

All donors must be over the age of 18 and have satisfactorily completed a donor form. An assessment is made by the Faculty of Health to determine the suitability of the donor. Donations cannot be accepted if the donor has been deceased for more than 4 days or if the family do not wish the donation to proceed. If the donation of a body is accepted, the Faculty of Health will make arrangements and meet expenses in relation to the transport and eventual cremation of the body. After cremation, the ashes will be available to the next of kin.

If the University declines to accept the body, it will not be responsible for the funeral arrangements or associated costs. The donor and their next of kin are therefore strongly advised to make alternative arrangements in case the body is unable to be accepted at the time of death.

Donor forms and more information can be downloaded from: www.utas.edu.au/medicine/medicine/programs/body-bequest.

Did you know?

There are urn pods available that will use the ash from a cremated body to grow a plant.
The law and your decisions

It won’t surprise you to learn that burials and cremations are surrounded by legislation and regulation, more reasons to plan in advance and not leave your family to discover that your wishes cannot be fulfilled. We are getting down to the real facts of end of life here, so put on your best matter-of-fact persona.

Burials and cremations in Tasmania are largely regulated by the Burials and Cremation Act 2002, Burial and Cremation (Cemetery) Regulations 2005 and Burial and Cremation (Handling of Human Remains) Regulations 2005. The regulations are under review at the time of writing. Much of the following was prepared by the Tasmanian Environmental Defender’s Office.

How soon do funeral arrangements need to be made?
There is a period of grace after someone dies – the regulations require that notification occurs ‘as soon as practicable’ and that a medical practitioner, once notified, must issue the death certificate within 8 hours of being notified. If you die at home there is time for family reflection and farewells. (2 days is the maximum time practicable, according to funeral directors.)

Where can you be buried?
In general, burials occur in authorised cemeteries and cremations in an authorised crematorium. However, you can be buried on private land - section 41 of the Burials and Cremation Act 2002 allows for the interment of human remains at places other than a cemetery, in certain circumstances. This will typically be in a rural property rather than in your urban backyard. Just note that it is an offence to dispose of any human remains except in accordance with the Act and any condition imposed by the Director of Public Health or local Council. The maximum penalty is $2,800.

If you wish to be buried on private land, you will need written permission from the landowner, the General Manager of the local Council and the Director of Public Health. Your local council Environmental Health Officer is probably the person who deals with these requests. When requesting formal consent from the General Manager, you will need to provide the written permission of the landholder, a statement regarding whether there are any other graves on the land and a plan depicting the exact location of the proposed grave and any other existing graves on the site. The Council General Manager then must get formal permission from the Director of Public Health. Permission may be subject to any conditions necessary to ensure that the proposed grave will not be a risk to public
health or safety or cause environmental harm, such as water contamination or the risk of water-borne disease.

If permission is granted by the local Council, records of the proposed grave site must be kept by the Council and shown on any land information certificate issued. Typically, burial approvals are registered on the land title, so that prospective purchasers are aware that there is a burial site on the property.

How deep must the grave be?

The 6ft under myth is just that - in general, the Burial and Cremation (Cemetery) Regulations 2005 require human remains interred in a cemetery to be buried so that the remains are completely covered by ground that is at least one metre deep at its shallowest point; or so that the remains are completely covered by at least a 50 millimetre thick layer of stone, concrete or similar durable material placed directly over the remains and ground that is at least 500 millimetres deep at its shallowest point. Concrete of course carries its own large footprint. However the Director of Public Health can approve an alternative depth or method of burial as long as this does not prejudice public health and safety. The cemetery manager is responsible for this.

These restrictions apply to cemetery burials only. Burials on other land are regulated by the conditions imposed by the General Manager of the relevant Council and the Director of Public Health, which may set a minimum depth or method of burial.

Do you have to be embalmed?

You are only required by law to be embalmed if you are being interred in an above-ground vault. Any body interred in an above ground vault must be ‘arterially embalmed’. This technical term means the replacement of blood by formaldehyde.

What materials do coffins need to be constructed from?

The Burial and Cremation (Handling of Human Remains) Regulations 2005 defines ‘coffin’ to include box, case or other receptacle designed for, and into which, human remains are placed for storage, movement, cremation or interment. A coffin must be: (a) impervious so as to prevent the escape of bodily discharges, contaminants or infectious materials; and (b) of sufficiently robust construction to enable the coffin and the human remains to be disposed of in accordance with the Act.

Within that technical description there is room for you to select a body container that expresses your desire for a low-impact departure. Talk to funeral directors well beforehand about a cardboard coffin, plantation timbers, bio-degradable coffins, bio-degradable vegetable-based liners, unbleached natural fabrics and shrouds. Remember that under the regulations, the container must be impermeable (leak-proof) and safely moveable.

This is a bit of a grey area so by being pro-active, you can help encourage the funeral industry to offer more eco-friendly options.

Did you know?

Pine coffins can be sourced from local pine plantations and made locally.
What if you want to be buried at sea?

Unlike other types of burials and cremation, burials at sea are regulated by the Commonwealth Department of Environment, under the *Environment Protection (Sea Dumping) Act 1981* (Cth). For burials at sea, a sea dumping permit will be required.

Permits are not always granted and generally will only be granted to those with a demonstrated connection to the sea, such as long serving navy personnel or fishers. If you wish to be buried at sea, you should make your wishes, and the reasons for these wishes, known in a will or to a family member. This will make it easier for the appropriate person to make a compelling request for you to be buried at sea. Unfortunately there is no way that you can apply for the authority before you die. The most difficult task in arranging a burial at sea is locating an appropriate burial site. Your chosen site must not conflict with other marine users (e.g. trawling, shipping) and must provide for burial at a depth greater than 3000m. Due to these constraints, the burial site is often required to be located a long distance offshore and its suitability may vary depending on tidal movements.

Any vessel carrying out the burial at sea must be a certificated commercial vessel, equipped with a GPS or similar to ensure that the burial takes place at the designated location. For burials at sea, the body must not be embalmed and should be sewn into a shroud (not placed in a casket or other such container). The shroud needs to be made of a very strong material and weighted sufficiently to ensure rapid sinking and permanent submersion of the body.


No permit is required to scatter ashes in the ocean so perhaps that is a good option.

*Did you know?*
Cardboard coffins are not made in Tasmania and have to be ordered from the mainland.

Transport

The legislation states that bodies must be transported in covered vehicles, with separation between the driver and coffin.

Where can ashes be scattered?

You may have a specific wish for a special place to scatter your ashes, if you have chosen cremation. There is no legislation regarding this, but you may require permission from the authorities responsible for that land or water.
Like a lot of life choices, end of life choices are not straight-forward and there are as many opinions as there are websites. Some say that cremation has the least impact, some that burial is the most eco-friendly. But let’s just do a reality check. The average household carbon footprint in Australia is 14 – 18 tonnes of greenhouse gas per year, so our funeral is going to be a small part of our life-time carbon footprint. The travel of mourners to the funeral and the provision of food and refreshments at the wake are likely to have a greater impact than our choice between burial and cremation. So if you want your departure to be consistent with your values, don’t worry too much about the choice between burial and cremation: there are pros and cons for each. This table will help you to choose the lowest impact options.

**FUNERAL CEREMONY**

- 200 guests at the funeral, travelling by car and plane.
- Unseasonal flowers flown in.
- Order of service printed on 120gsm virgin fibre paper, discarded at end of service.
- Food and drinks served without regard for food miles or supporting local growers and suppliers.

**Did you know?**

Crematoria in Tasmania use gas and burn at a temperature between 900 and 1500° C for approximately 2 hours. This produces about 74 kgs of CO₂. A coffin and body produce 141 kgs of CO₂ (roughly equivalent to a return flight to Sydney).

- Distant mourners invited to share images and thoughts digitally.
- Establish a time for people to individually remember and celebrate the lost life in whatever way they feel is most appropriate – wherever they are.
- Garden flowers /donations to your preferred charity.
- Order of service printed on 90gsm recycled paper and recycled after service.
- Food and drinks sensitive to food miles and local growers and suppliers.
**In our empty hand**

**We feel the shape**

**Of simple eternity.**

MICHAEL LEUNIG

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<tr>
<th>BURIAL</th>
<th>CREMATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>![footprint]</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Burial in specialty timber casket, lined with quilted satin, brass handles, pvc liner.</td>
<td>• Cremation in specialty timber casket, lined with quilted satin, brass handles, pvc liner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Body embalmed with formaldehyde.</td>
<td>• Body embalmed with formaldehyde.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Grave site marked with full length stone cover and sculpted marble headstone and set in high maintenance garden cemetery.</td>
<td>• Cremator not to air pollution standards.</td>
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<td>• Frequent mourner visits to grave.</td>
<td>• Elaborate urn + memorial plaque or rosebush.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Elaborate clothing and jewellery.</td>
<td>• Elaborate clothing and jewellery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Burial in cardboard or locally made plantation timber coffin or other eco-friendly material, plain calico lining, bio-degradable vegetable liner, rope handles.</td>
<td>• Cremation in cardboard or locally made plantation timber coffin or other eco-friendly material, plain calico lining, bio-degradable vegetable liner, rope handles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Body un-embalmed.</td>
<td>• Body un-embalmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grave site marked with simple natural stone in setting with minimal maintenance.</td>
<td>• Ashes scattered in significant nearby location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Occasional or rare mourner visits.</td>
<td>• Body covered in shroud, no jewellery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Body covered in shroud, no jewellery.</td>
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What is the future?

Not too far in the future, there will be other options for reducing our final footprint even more. Some are already available in other countries:


**Cryomation (or promession)** – involves freeze drying with liquid nitrogen and then fragmentation of the remains which can then buried to compost. [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promession](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promession)

**Resomation (or alkali hydrolysis)** – involves the breakdown of the body in a bath of water and lye. [www.resomation.com](http://www.resomation.com)

None of these options are available in Tasmania in 2015.

Bicycle hearse

Where to go for info

**GETTING TECHNICAL**


**PLANNING**

- [www.naturalburialcreator.co.uk/extras/4580467987 and go to ‘Funeral Directive’ if you want to be really prescriptive to your loved ones about your ending.](http://www.naturalburialcreator.co.uk/extras/4580467987)
- [www.crossings.net and www.crossings.net/Crossings%20Home%20Care%20Summary.pdf](http://www.crossings.net) for your family who may want to keep your body at home for a while after death.

Did you know?

Weedicides and pesticides are commonly used in the maintenance of lawn cemeteries.
Planning ahead for your burial and funeral is the key to reducing your ecological footprint. Making your wishes known to your loved ones is important and it is beneficial to ensure that someone you trust has been asked to organise your funeral and burial as you would wish it.

Cardboard coffins need to be imported from the mainland (www.cardboardcoffinsaustralia.com.au / www.lifeart.com.au/about-lifeart/enviroboard) and sustainable plantation pine coffins need to be pre-ordered through a funeral director. If you wish to make your own coffin or have one purpose-built, it needs to meet specific standards and be approved for use by a funeral director. If you want a bio-urn, this will need to be pre-ordered (for example: www.ecocitizenaustralia.com.au/reincarnate-tree/).

A sea burial takes weeks, perhaps months, to organise as permits need to be obtained. Your ashes can be used as a basis for planting or can be scattered over the land or sea with minimal environmental impact. However, depending on where you want them scattered, a land manager’s permission may need to be obtained.

Burial in the bushland cemetery at Kingston can be arranged through any funeral director. It is not necessary to have any mark for the grave. Many people opt for a simple stone marker.

Burial on your own land is possible but has to meet legislative requirements.

A funeral is not a legal requirement and can be as simple as you wish. It may be simply setting a time for people to pause to think of you or a sharing of images and music via the internet.

An eco-friendly funeral can be conducted as an informal family celebration with food supplied locally and garden plants and flowers used for decoration. It can be in the outdoors, on a boat, wherever you wish that’s central for most loved ones to attend. There are celebrants and stylists who can help to arrange it.

You can give to others in your death through organ donation or body bequests. Endowing money or land to organisations working to protect the environment or to improve social equity is another way to help the world after your death. This can be done at the same time as making your will.
Further reading
Andrew Anastasios, Dying to know: Bringing death to life, Pilotlight Australia 2007

Contacts
Tasmanian Association for Hospice and Palliative Care www.tas.palliativecare.org.au
Sustainable Living Tasmania www.slt.org.au
Environmental Defenders Office www.edotas.org.au
Hobart Community Legal Centre www.hobartlegal.org.au
Launceston Community Legal Centre www.lclc.net.au
North West Community Legal Centre www.nwclc.org.au
Environment Protection Agency www.epa.tas.gov.au
Funeral directors – see Yellow Pages
Local Government – see Yellow Pages

Your final checklist
- Talk to your loved ones about your dying wishes
- Appoint someone you trust as your Enduring Power of Attorney to manage your wishes
- Make a financial and emotional will
- Decide between burial and cremation
- Choose to become an organ donor or bequeath your body to science
- Discuss your options with a Funeral Director
- Decide on the type of coffin and clothing you want
- Pre-order your coffin, make your own or have one made
- Decide where you want to be buried or have your ashes scattered
- Ensure you have the correct permits
- Discuss with your loved ones the type of funeral and wake you would like
- Designate a charity or organisation to which you would like to bequeath and ensure it is in your will
- Relax and enjoy life!

Thanks
We wish to extend thanks to the following people for their time and patience in answering our many questions: Scott Turnbull, Turnbulls Family Funerals; Travis Tann and Tamara Whitehead, Millingtons Funeral Homes and Cemeteries; Faridah Cameron, Private Funeral Celebrant; Anna Spinaze, TAHPC and Sarah Wilson, Environmental Defenders Office.

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Compiled by Helen Pryor and Margaret Steadman and designed by Kelly Eijdenberg, 2015.