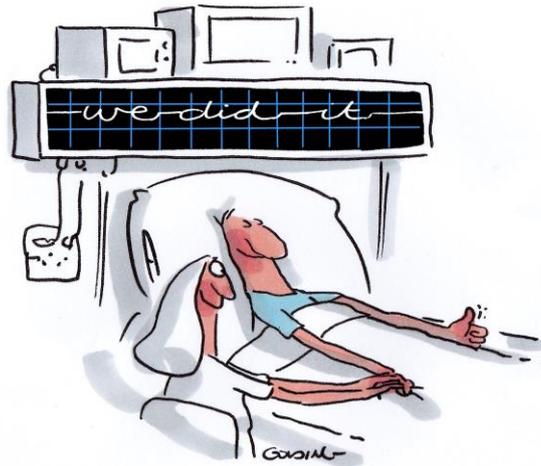




Go Gentle Australia



You Helped Make Victoria Kinder

After almost three years of research and consultation, a cross-parliamentary inquiry, an expert ministerial advisory panel, countless public debates, and more than 100 hours of forensic argument in both Houses of Parliament, Victoria has become the first state in Australia to pass a Voluntary Assisted Dying law.

The magnitude of this achievement is not to be under-estimated. Within hours it was news around the world - stories appearing everywhere from BBC News and the New York Times to Pulse Nigeria - and there are now renewed calls in every state of Australia for similar laws to be passed.

Our opponents warned that passing this law would be 'crossing a Rubicon' that would change Victoria forever. We agree - and we say 'at last'.

- At last we have a law that provides a more compassionate choice at the end of life than the barbaric ritual of starving and dehydrating yourself to death.
- At last we have a law that takes the power in end of life decisions out of the hands of doctors and puts it squarely in the hands of the person who truly matters - the person who is suffering and dying.

- At last we are saying that, in 2017, we can do better than have doctors guided in their end of life decisions by the medieval Doctrine of Double Effect.
- At last, the terminally ill of Victoria who have been suiciding at the rate of one a week now have a place they can turn, legally, where they can be heard and they can be helped.

For this law to be passed many stars had to align. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Andrews Government, and in particular the Health Minister, Jill Hennessy, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The expert panel led by Professor Brian Owler devised a workable framework, building on the crucial work done by the cross-parliamentary committee. Victorian parliamentarians of all political persuasions, who argued for and supported this law (sometimes against their own political interests), also deserve our deepest thanks.

One man, in particular, has earned the loudest praise. For 20 years he has put his liberty at risk by openly and compassionately assisting desperate Victorians to die, challenging the law to take him to court. Dr Rodney Syme's principled bravery is of the highest order. In a just world he would be Australian of the Year. Unfortunately, his Test Batting average is just too low.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge your contribution. Ultimately, Victoria's law became a reality because enough people of principle were prepared to put their shoulder to the wheel to make a difference. Thank you for taking the time to act for the greater good.

Victoria's law will come into effect in 2019, after an eighteen-month implementation period. It will offer a choice to competent adults with a terminal illness and six months or less to live. For those dying of neuro-degenerative diseases, such as MND or MS, the time frame is extended to twelve months or less to live.

Making Australia Kinder: The Work of Go Gentle Continues.

The passing of this law will make for a more compassionate Victoria. The law itself - as well as the deeply consultative and evidence-based process that led to it - will become a template for the rest of Australia.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the legalisation of VAD will swiftly lead to the same happening elsewhere. The narrow failures in NSW, Tasmania and SA over the last year are stark reminders that the forces of opposition are as entrenched and implacable as ever.

Just this week one of the most outspoken opponents, Federal AMA President Michael Gannon, claimed, falsely, in the *West Australian* that the main group seeking euthanasia in the Netherlands are 'women over 50 without cancer or

chronic illness'. The truth, as public records show, is that in 2017, 51% of the small number of people euthanised in the Netherlands were men and 85% of all people euthanised had an advanced incurable illness, the clear majority being cancer.

It is no coincidence that Dr Gannon works at Perth's St John of God Hospital. He was getting in early, trying to influence politicians ahead of the WA End of Life Inquiry currently taking place. The tactics of opponents remain the same: spread Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt. Distort the evidence from overseas. Ignore the evidence of suffering in Australia.

Go Gentle's mission statement is to **'help relieve the distress, helplessness** and suffering experienced by Australians with incurable or terminal illnesses, their families and carers'.

As Australian Greens leader Richard Di Natale has pointed out, it is not fair that, just because you live on the right side of the Murray River, you now have access to the full range of end-of-life care options.

So our work continues.

In the New Year, you will hear from our new CEO, Kiki Paul, about the road ahead.

We hope that you will stay with us and offer your continued support as we seek to extend compassionate end-of-life care to all Australians.

Wishing you all the best for the holiday period and the New Year.

Andrew Denton