



## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY


STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES  
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### Inquiry into the Management of ACT Cemeteries

#### Submission to the inquiry

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4 - Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

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## SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO ACT CEMETERIES

### 1. Southern Memorial Park

For at least seven years now the new ACT cemetery at Hume to be known as Southern Memorial Park (SMP) has been in the planning. The new cemetery was planned for based on a number of factors:

- Woden cemetery closing due to lack of capacity around 2017
- The increasingly aged population in southern Canberra
- The possibility of increased options for burial/memorialisation/cremation for the ACT community including natural burial.
- A business model that would provide funding for ACT Cemeteries into the future. The cemeteries at Woden, Gungahlin and Hall were never established in light of a business case.

That the Government has not budgeted for the initial development of the new cemetery has now become a problem. Woden cemetery is reaching capacity, the population is ageing and there soon will be nowhere in south Canberra for burial of any kind - lawn, headstone or natural.

Given the above, I believe it is preferable that the ACT Government make the decision to immediately proceed with the first stage of the SMP at Hume. The Government has already delayed the inevitable by at least 5 years from when it was first perceived a new cemetery would be needed. The time has come to address the obvious need.

While I recognise the start-up costs are considerable, the new cemetery needs a business model that will make it economically viable.

The SMP has the possibility of providing many facilities that simply cannot be included at Woden particularly: natural burial, at least one new crematorium, function centre(s), picnic facilities, cafes, memorialisation walls and gardens etc.

A strategic business case could surely see start-up costs re-couped in a reasonable time.

One feature of any new cemetery in Australia today is that of limited tenure for burials. For certain groups this is a problematic arrangement. From a Catholic perspective the arrangement of limited tenure is not desirable. Our belief is that the body is sacred and that once a person dies and is buried they rest in the grave until the day of resurrection. The idea of disturbing a grave that we bless and make a sacred site for a burial is troubling to religious sensibilities.

Ideally, the possibility of burial in perpetuity would remain an option in some form at the new SMP for Catholics but also other groups in the community who favour this option.

Along with provision for some perpetual tenure at the SMP, consideration should also be given to areas for different religious traditions. There was strong community support for this regarding the Woden extension and this should also be provided for at Hume.

## **2. Norwood Park Crematorium**

This is the only facility for cremations in the ACT and surrounding districts. The owners provide the people of the ACT with some of the most disappointing facilities for cremation I have seen anywhere. They are an example of how a monopoly has prospered but with providing the most limited facilities for clients.

The ACT community desperately needs competition in the area of cremation. Another operator or two would break the existing monopoly of Norwood Park and see competition provide greater facilities for people. The sterile environment of the facility provided by the Norwood Park operator is embarrassing. Frequently the facility cannot accommodate large numbers of people. The facilities are very limited for a service that is much in demand.

It would be my hope that the new SMP would provide a number of chapels catering for the major religious traditions as well as for those who have no religious or spiritual beliefs. Another crematorium would certainly be servicing a real need into the future.

### **3. Woden Extension**

I am aware of the July 2015 Community Consultation Report on extending Woden Cemetery.

If the ACT Government cannot fund the first stage of the SMP anytime soon, then I would urge that the proposed extension to Woden cemetery take place. The following reasons suggest this:

- In the community consultation the vast majority of people -73% - supported the extension. By any measure a significant group in the community of Woden are supportive of the proposal for the land in their local area.
- Burial capacity will run out in Woden by mid-2018. It seems most unfair that people in south Canberra would be denied any possibility of using Woden cemetery given that there is land available.
- The only option for burial would become Gungahlin or Hall even for people in south Canberra. Families in south Canberra would rightly ask why they cannot bury their loved ones closer in the new cemetery that is inevitable? An extension to Woden is an acceptable interim response.
- The Catholic community are about 50% of all burials in Woden on an annual basis. Our community - ministers and congregations - would experience an extra burden if the only option for burial is Gungahlin. Much of the burden would be associated with time involved to drive past Woden for Gungahlin for those in south Canberra.
- I note the opposition of the Woden Community Council to the proposed extension. It seems to me this is somewhat short-sighted. Woden cemetery is historic and represents much of the social history of Canberra. It is a resource that has great potential for enriching the town centre. The extension will continue to bring people into the Woden area and see utilisation of nearby clubs and facilities.

### **4. Funding Model**

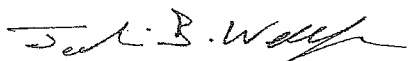
There will always be much discussion about government or the private sector operating cemeteries and economic arguments to support various positions. It is beyond me to enter that discussion. I would note that the people of the ACT appear to have been generally well served by the ACT Cemeteries Authority and the present arrangements.

In many places where Church groups or the private sector have run cemeteries this has from time to time been problematic. In Australia at least the State has the stability, longevity and resources to ensure the proper operation of cemeteries over the long term.

I would favour the present arrangements whereby the ACT Government operated the cemeteries in the ACT via its' own Cemeteries Authority. The business model for the Authority may need both development and refinement to ensure a sustainable business.

## **5. Other Relevant Issues**

The reality is that the extension to Woden cemetery is a stop-gap measure to delay the inevitable opening of the SMP at Hume with all the benefits that will bring. It is disappointing that in the planned city of Canberra we cannot plan for and budget for such basic needs as a new cemetery in a timely manner. How is it that Woden cemetery will have no capacity by 2018 and the community still does not know what will happen? Even if a decision is made to proceed with the extension this, I believe, is a result that ultimately satisfies no one in the community because it is recognised the real solution is the new SMP.



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31 August 2017