
MEDIA RELEASE

From Andrew Woodhouse

President, Australian Heritage Institute, an Australia-wide group of local heritage societies

Suite 12, 3 McDonald Street Potts Point NSW 2011

Ph 0415 949 506

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State Government moves to evict Chinese market gardeners at historic La Perouse site and downgrade heritage based on hidden report. Calls for Kristina Keneally to intervene.

“NSW Premier, Kristina Keneally, should intervene to provide Sydney with more sustainable food sources and stop her Land Property Management Authority from evicting second-generation Chinese market gardeners from their Bunnerong Road, La Perouse, Crown Lease, just to increase profits and plots for a nearby cemetery,” Andrew Woodhouse, said today.

Mr Woodhouse was invited with about 50-60 members of the Chinese Community to a meeting yesterday called by NSW Community Relations Commission to discuss land use changes at the controversial market gardens site.

The scheme, supported by the authority and promoted by the Eastern Suburbs Memorial Cemetery Trust, calls for eviction by 2013 of two of three lease holders, and resumption of 60% of the current market gardens, according to information provided at the meeting (agenda available).

However, no guarantee is provided of any future site for two leaseholders and no guarantee the remaining 40% will be not be resumed at a later date.

Former Labor Party Minister-turned paid lobbyist, Gary Punch, spoke for his clients, the Eastern Suburbs Memorial Trust [ESMT], who aim to purloin public land for their commercial benefit.

The ESMT is owned by the NSW state government and has been the subject of previous public concerns about conflicts of interest.

See SMH: "State Buys into Funeral Service", by Paul Bibby 27 November 2009, p9 - see full text below*

"The whole rationale of this proposal is a house of cards, with the area's heritage, dating back to land use by Count La Perouse in 1788 according to the NSW Heritage Council,** to be handed over to fill state government coffers depleted by financial mismanagement," Woodhouse says.

[** go to http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5044696

"According to Glen Blaxland, a local historian and once a member of the local historical society in the Municipality, Count de La Perouse cleared a piece of land and established a vegetable garden in Phillip Bay to prepare vegetables for his return journey back to France.

The first known name of this suburb area was the Frenchman's Gardens. It is believed that this vegetable garden was Australia's first primary industry site and the site was more or less the same site as the Chinese Market Gardens. According to Randwick - A Social History, published by Randwick Council in 1985 ... until 1859, the market gardens were owned and tended by Europeans ..."]

"Clearly, the ESMT is guilty of re-writing history to suit itself, claiming in their heritage report there has been no market gardening on the site until after 1904.

"Show us your evidence," Woodhouse says.

"Claims that heritage plaques or other interpretation will be installed on the site post-resumption are tokenism," Woodhouse said.

In yesterday's one-sided meeting conflicting claims from Gary Punch and George Passas [ESMT] about whether work will begin in 3 or 7 years, the actual costs, perhaps up to \$40 million in five \$8 million stages, and information contained in a heritage report by an architect, Paul Rappaport, which the ESMT refuses to release, all point to a lack of transparency and accountability.

"The meeting was presentation, not consultation," Woodhouse says. "It lacked credibility."

"This is not a 'public good versus private interests' battle, as Gary Punch claims," Woodhouse says; "it's a 7-hectare land grab based on unknown heritage evidence to remove private, profitable, sustainable businesses to make profits from the dead for the government."

"Offers to set aside 20% of new burial plots for Chinese community and a temple are simply bribes," Woodhouse says with further comments by Gary Punch that "Quite frankly, if you were not Chinese but English Australians there would be no problem with all this" being not only factually incorrect but prejudiced, perhaps even racist.

Mr Woodhouse has applied under FOI laws for the disputed heritage report.

"This whole dodgy project should be referred to an Independent Commission of Enquiry," Woodhouse says.

For further comments please also phone:

Ms Daphne Lowe-Kelley, President

Chinese Heritage Association of Australia Inc. ph 0417 655 233

email lowekelley@bigpond.com

Mr Terry Ha, Chinese market gardener & leaseholder

President, Australian Chinese Growers' Association of NSW

ph 0419 218 794

email terry8ha@hotmail.com

*SMH Nov 2009:

THE State Government has quietly entered the funeral business, giving Crown land cemeteries permission to set up funeral homes that will compete with private operators.

This week the Lands Minister, Tony Kelly, officially opened the first funeral home on state-owned land at the Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park in Maroubra. Public cemeteries at Frenchs Forest and Macquarie Park are expected to follow.

The service will provide packages from about \$7000, allowing families to arrange everything from documentation and coffin to burial or cremation at one location. Previously the Crown land trusts which run state-owned cemeteries charged private operators for the use of burial and cremation facilities.

Now, with the encouragement and permission of the Government, these trusts can offer services directly to families, potentially removing the middle man, the private funeral director.

Mr Kelly said the trusts would retain the profits to fund long-term maintenance of the cemetery and "preserve important public assets".

The Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association said it was concerned about a conflict of interest because the Government was also responsible for regulating the industry.

"The 2005 inquiry into the funeral industry said there needed to be greater regulation and transparency of pricing so that low-income earners can afford a funeral. But the Government still hasn't done that," said the policy co-ordinator, Charmaine Crowe.

The chief executive of Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park, George Passas, said the new service would offer lower prices. "We will not be charging the same huge margins that private operators charge on coffins and other costs," he said.