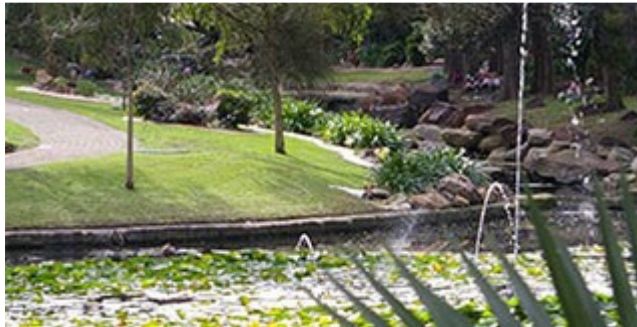


Faiths unite on cemetery

Nick Moncrieff-Hill, Southern Courier, 15 Nov 2010

[<http://southern-courier.whereilive.com.au/news/story/faiths-unite-on-cemetery/>]



Plans to uproot a commercial vegetable patch in Phillip Bay to make way for burial plots have united three of the largest religious communities in Sydney's southeast.

The Roman Catholic Church has joined the Greek Orthodox and Jewish communities to support the Eastern Suburbs Memorial Trust in a campaign to acquire almost two thirds of the Chinese market gardens.

The plan would allow the extension of Botany Cemetery by 4ha and would mean two of the three families that cultivate the land would be forced out.

Father Dominic Ceresoli, the parish priest of the Saint Therese Church at Mascot, said there was a "real need" for the acquisition to "cope with the ageing of our community and an acute shortage of burial space".

Memorial Trust CEO George Passas estimated the cemetery will have reached capacity within 12 years, a shortage of space made worse by a common aversion to cremation.

Father Ceresoli said despite the Catholic Church's relaxed stance regarding cremation, for many Catholics in the area it was not an option. "It has to be remembered, vast numbers in our community came to Australia in the 1950s," he said. "It is on the back of these immigrants, be they Italian, Greek, Maltese and others, that the prosperity of Mascot and Botany has evolved.

"It is a matter of fairness that their wishes be taken into account."

But a Department of Lands study dated May 2008 found the land was "not suitable for the establishment of a cemetery" given its susceptibility to flooding and erosion. However a spokesman for the trust said it was "more than happy to say the plans it has are feasible and practical".

Meanwhile, Randwick Mayor Murray Matson has vowed to continue to fight the transfer of land and said he would ask his fellow councillors to support a resolution to approach the State Government to have the land zoned rural.

"I think any State Government that is conscious of environmentally sustainable development principles would hesitate to give away viable farmland in an urban situation when it could be retained," Cr Matson said.