



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the management of ACT cemeteries](#))

Members:

MS S ORR (Chair)
MR S DOSZPOT (Deputy Chair)
MS T CHEYNE
MR M PARTON

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2017

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Secretary to the committee:
Mr A Snedden (Ph: 620 50199)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

WITNESSES

WELLSPRING, FATHER JULIAN, Parish Priest, Catholic Archdiocese of
Canberra and Goulburn.....**1**

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 11.02 am.

WELLSPRING, FATHER JULIAN, Parish Priest, Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the first hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services into the management of ACT cemeteries. The standing committee adopted this reference in July 2017. The committee's terms of reference are on the committee website.

The committee has now received 12 submissions, all of which are published and lodged on the committee's website. The committee invites feedback from interested persons on any of the issues raised by the submissions. The committee plans to hold three public hearings, the first of which will be held this morning, and two other hearings on 11 and 18 October 2017. Today's hearing is public, is being recorded by Hansard and is accessible through the Assembly committees on demand webstreaming site.

Today I welcome Father Julian Wellspring as the committee's first witness. Julian, are you aware of the privilege statement that is on the desk? Have you read it?

Father Wellspring: Yes, I have read the privilege statement, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Father Wellspring, the committee has your submission to the inquiry on behalf of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn for discussion and consideration today. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Father Wellspring: In the first instance I would like to thank you for accommodating me so that I could be present to speak to the matter today. I am very conscious that, by about the middle of next year, there will be no more capacity to bury people at Woden if people do not already have a plot purchased there. I think the decision that the government has to look at, either doing something about starting the new southern memorial park or extending Woden, needs to be made and made fairly soon. From our point of view we would like to see the Assembly make a decision about what is going to happen. That is really, in a way, my major motivating reason for being here, to simply give some encouragement on that matter.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You referred to a Woden expansion or the southern memorial park. In your submission you say that you are supportive of the Woden expansion, but we have received quite a few submissions which are not supportive of the expansion, particularly from community councils and members of the Woden community. Given that view, would your position change in any way to favour—

Father Wellspring: I am conscious of the Woden community council view. I went along to a meeting there one Thursday, just to listen to them. There was a small group of people there, so I am not sure how representative they might have been of the wider community. I can understand that they are worried about a loss of green space for the community. That seems to be their main concern. However, if the expansion of Woden does proceed, one of the challenges will be to keep the cemetery also as a

wider resource for the community.

The modern approach to cemeteries is very much that of a park, if you like. In part it is a matter of making sure that, if that expansion does go ahead, the park element can be incorporated and the green element of the cemetery can be preserved and encouraged. Even though I am aware of that opposition, our thought would be that if the southern memorial park is not going to proceed we would be supportive of the expansion of Woden.

THE CHAIR: You talked about having a park facility in a cemetery. Can you explain in a little more detail what you understand that as being?

Father Wellspring: That could incorporate a number of things, including places where people could sit. You could look at some facilities for people to picnic there. That, too, is now quite common in a number of cemeteries overseas. There has been talk for some years about turning the little room, just as you go into Woden Cemetery, into a cafe and being able to offer some sort of amenities there. Those are the kinds of things that could be looked at and considered.

MS CHEYNE: With the Woden Valley Community Council meeting that you went to, do you recall how many people were there?

Father Wellspring: There might have been about 20.

MR PARTON: If I had to summarise your submission in one word, I probably would have summarised it as “exasperation”. I want your feedback on whether this is a fair assessment of it: you are dismayed that we know what solution is required but we have not moved?

Father Wellspring: That would be very perceptive and accurate. With the planning for the southern memorial park, I was involved in this quite some time ago. I have been the contact person for the archdiocese for maybe 15 years. I remember when they first started talking about the southern memorial park. It has just been put off and put off. The planning for it has all been done, but we did not seem to get the funding together with that planning in order for it to go ahead. There is a certain exasperation now on my part that we could be faced with a situation in 2018 where the only option for people in southern Canberra to have burials, if they do not already own a plot at Woden, is to go to Gungahlin.

MR PARTON: In regard to that exasperation, and in regard to the southern memorial park, I do not want to add to the exasperation but I note that my friend Martin Miller has made a submission to this inquiry. He raises concerns about the site at Hume. He is worried that it will be too close to the landfill site, that it is not easily accessible by public transport and that it is not close to accommodation. Woden is perfect because people that are coming can stay close by. At the risk of heading us off in other directions, he has suggested some other sites. Do you have any concerns at all with the location of the proposed southern memorial park?

Father Wellspring: No, not really. I think people like Hamish Horne and the cemetery authorities have a fairly good grasp of that. I trust their judgement on that.

I actually think there are some advantages to the Hume site, one of them simply being the access to materials—the whole light industrial zone there that you would need when it comes to monuments, burials and all of that stuff. There is a lot of collocation of industries that will benefit and support such an option. Having regard to the plans that I have seen for the southern memorial, that seems to be a reasonable option. We have no specific concerns about that. The ACT government does need to look at where a new cemetery is going to be and make a decision about it. But we do not have any particular concerns with the Hume option. That seems to be a reasonable option.

MS CHEYNE: Is Hume in your electorate?

MR PARTON: Yes, but no-one lives there. No, it is not, actually. I think it is part of Kurrajong.

MS CHEYNE: Is it?

MR PARTON: Yes, I think it is.

MS CHEYNE: Father, is it fair to summarise your position as being exasperated but that you are supportive of any cemetery, and that the southern memorial park is certainly fine? And because that will take a while, given that it is October 2017 and Woden will run out of space by mid-2018, in the interim we need to extend Woden while also planning for the southern memorial park; is that correct?

Father Wellspring: Yes, to a certain extent, if I can hedge my bets a little bit, in the sense that the reality is that the ACT will need another cemetery. The tsunami of ageing is upon us. Indeed, government is going to experience that even more acutely. The cemetery issue is just another element to all of that. The issues associated with a new cemetery are linked back to all of that demand in the future. The Woden extension is a stopgap for a while. It delays what is inevitable, and not for long. That would be my reading of it.

MS CHEYNE: It is a stopgap but a necessary stopgap, because time is running out?

Father Wellspring: Yes. It may well be that we are at the stage even now where it would be impossible to get the southern memorial park up and running. Therefore, if Woden is the next option, the extension to Woden would be the option that we would be looking to go with. But we are supportive, in a sense, of either one. There is what you would like in an ideal world. Sometimes you do not get that. You have to live in the real world. There are constraints on government with the budget. Between the tram, Mr Fluffy and health and education, budgets are stretched. So we have to live in the real world. The extension to Woden seems like a reasonable option.

MS CHEYNE: Where does Gungahlin factor in? That is where I am going with my question. If we said southern memorial was to go ahead and we had a little period when Woden was full, instead of extending Woden, would accommodating burials at Gungahlin be a viable alternative, in your opinion?

Father Wellspring: The burials at—

MS CHEYNE: Gungahlin, because Gungahlin does have land; it does have a supply there. It is available. If southern memorial was progressed and Woden did run out while that was being progressed, instead of extending it, would utilising the land at Gungahlin also be an alternative?

Father Wellspring: I think it is reasonable, if you can show the ACT community that there is a commitment to moving with the southern memorial park. In that case it would not be unreasonable for people to go and use Gungahlin. But I do not think you want to protract it for too long. As I said, I am conscious that, if you happen to live down in Banks and your son or daughter is killed and you want to bury them and the only area that you can do that in is out at Gungahlin, it is almost a day's trip out there, to the burial site and back again.

MS CHEYNE: It is not that far away.

MR PARTON: It is a long way away. You have to change currency; you almost go to Queanbeyan!

Father Wellspring: Absolutely. Of course, the other thing that has happened is that there are many Canberrans who are buried in the Queanbeyan cemetery. In a sense, borders have never saved anyone. People are practical, at the end of the day. In a world in which we have to face looking at getting a new cemetery, if we can get on with the southern memorial park, there might be a time when it is only possible to bury at Gungahlin, but ideally I think that would not be the case.

MR PARTON: Queanbeyan has not actually been mentioned, I do not think, in any of the submissions.

Father Wellspring: No.

MR PARTON: I have not seen it mentioned. I have been to a number of services in Queanbeyan recently for Canberra residents, and I am surprised that it was not mentioned. Whatever happens, a stopgap will be required. Unless there is a decision made to extend at Woden, there has to be another option.

MS CHEYNE: Or we just cremate everybody.

Father Wellspring: Again let's go to cremations. That is one of my—

MS CHEYNE: That is where I am heading.

Father Wellspring: That is one of my favourites. With respect to my friends at Norwood Park, as you can tell, that is part of my exasperation. I really feel that the people of the ACT have not been served well by that facility. I have gone to far too many cremations where people have been standing outside. I think there is seating for about 100 people, and, particularly when you have tragic deaths of young people, a teenager or a young adult, people turn up in huge numbers and the facilities there just cannot cope. They have had a monopoly on the place. They were shamed into building that reception area about 10 or 15 years ago. I think Canberrans get the very worst deal on cremation from that point of view. The southern memorial park would

introduce competition and I think that would benefit the ACT community.

MS CHEYNE: Just to tease out some of the things you have spoken about already, the tsunami of ageing is certainly not lost on any of us, and a lot of it is in the south of Canberra as well. Also the population in the south of Canberra is changing and quite a lot of the population is moving to the north. I know you make the point that people ask why their loved ones can't be buried closer, but in terms of a long-term, viable option, would it make more sense to be burying or cremating people where the populations are heading? If we flip it, potentially we will have all these people in Gungahlin thinking, "I've got to go to Hume."

Father Wellspring: Really, Gungahlin was built for north Canberra, in that sense; that was all part of the thinking at the time. Indeed, it is a great resource going forward, as people in Belconnen and inner north Canberra all age. Gungahlin is not a limited resource. You might have the figures; Hamish gave them to me at one stage as to what year he felt that Gungahlin 2 would reach a certain capacity. It is certainly a stopgap solution but I do not think it is a long-term solution.

With the Woden extension, in terms of locality and what people already have access to, given that there is a bit more land there, I think we are talking about three to five acres or something in that order. Given that the cemetery is already there, it does not seem to be a huge ask from the community in Woden to have the extension. I notice that in their own survey there is quite considerable community support for it, in that wider survey that was done about extending it. There was not ferocious opposition by the wider community.

MS CHEYNE: Seventy per cent is a lot. Going back to cremations, knowing that land is limited right now, has there been a flow-on impact on operational matters or what you recommend to people? Are you aware of this in the broader community with respect to people who deal with people who are dying, in recommending to people, "Maybe you should think about being cremated instead of a burial, because if you don't have a plot you probably can't be buried"?

Father Wellspring: Just to clarify something, I personally do not recommend options to anybody in that situation. It is an individual choice. The Catholic Church is very comfortable with people being buried or cremated. Our preference, if you like, would be for burial. Our only reservation about cremation is a nuance. The church was somewhat opposed to cremation for a long time because it was basically done as a pagan practice and a denial of the resurrection of the body, which is something we as Catholics believe in. That was our hesitation about that. But in the society that we are living in today, Catholics who are being cremated are not in any way denying the resurrection or anything like that, in our experience.

Indeed, my experience would be that, as with many decisions in life, the decision about a funeral will often come down to economics and what can be afforded, and a cremation is much cheaper in Canberra today than a burial. Our fees for burial are not insignificant. I know there are a variety of reasons for that. Cremation is certainly an option that I would say is popular, not only with our community but more generally in the society in which we live and probably will continue to be so.

MS CHEYNE: But the lack of land, in the Catholic realm, has not influenced—

Father Wellspring: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: You are saying that it is more about popularity and economics?

Father Wellspring: Yes. It is popular; it is economic. Places that have come to terms much better with the provision of facilities would be somewhere like Northern Suburbs crematorium in Sydney. They have three or four different chapels. They have a chapel which you might call a Christian chapel. There is a chapel for the Islamic community and there might be a chapel for people who have no spiritual beliefs. If you like, they have catered for the community and for the spectrum of beliefs. They have sought to position themselves very much for that factor—the demand for cremation and the fact that, going forward, there will be even greater demand, and from people who might be of deep faith as well as people who have no particular faith.

Coming back to our Norwood Park experience, because we live in this environment where we do not want to offend anyone, there are no Christian symbols there, and I can understand that, in a way; I get it. But it has generated a sterile environment. It is more sterile than an operating theatre. It is a dreadful experience to work in such an environment.

At least if you had some chapels for cremation in the new southern memorial park, some of which might have some religious themes for people who have religious sensibilities, and if you had chapels that catered for people who had no particular belief, we could do the whole thing much better. It would help people in our community to grieve for their loss effectively and to do that in an environment that is supportive and compassionate.

THE CHAIR: On that note, you have mentioned a few things with Norwood Park in terms of the size of its facility—I think you cited roughly 100 fitting in there—and that it does not have any religious features. Is there anything else that you see with the crematorium? Your submission is quite firm in its view that Norwood is not providing an adequate service. Is there anything else that you can detail for us?

Father Wellspring: Parking is somewhat under stress when you have a big crowd of people. They did build that function centre, and I acknowledge that. I think that it has its limitations. I suppose they would be the main issues. I hesitate to say this because it might look a bit self-interested. They have a vestry for the minister. It seems to have basically turned into a bit of a storeroom rather than functioning for the purpose it was built for. The place does not seem to have had much done to it by way of any kind of renewal and updating. Those would be the observations I would make.

Indeed, the fact is that there is only one crematorium there. It is not like they have even expanded it. Their demand is high. If you were to die this week, now, you probably could not book for your cremation before about Tuesday or Wednesday of next week. There is a lag time, and they are operating around the clock, basically.

MS CHEYNE: Is that putting pressure on morgues and other places?

Father Wellspring: I do not know, but I know that when it comes to organising a funeral, if somebody wants to be cremated and to have that happen quickly, that is not necessarily a straightforward thing. There is a delay.

MS CHEYNE: Does that affect some people's grieving processes as well? Some people want a cremation or a burial to happen quickly and some people might not care. Have you found that sometimes the lag has affected how people are dealing with grief?

Father Wellspring: The way the undertakers and probably the ministers or whoever work in those circumstances is that, because death is foreign territory to most people in our community, they are vulnerable and they are in an area where they do not know what to expect, and they do not often feel they can demand much. So when they are told, "The crematorium can cope with you on Friday; that is the first possibility," nobody is going to challenge that or have an argument about it. You can probably get a burial more quickly than a cremation, I suspect.

The other area—and Norwood Park could tell you more about their operations in this regard—is that, in the final part of the cremation, the coffin goes down and you see no more. I would like to know how long some of those coffins are waiting before they are actually put into the burner. Given demand, I think you will find there could be a 24-hour wait on getting access to the furnace. They could tell you more about that, though. I am not familiar with those details. But I would not be surprised, given the demand for the service.

The sooner we get another crematorium operating here, the sooner it will provide competition for Norwood Park, and it would be economically successful. I do not think there will be any slackening in demand. I think you would find that a crematorium at the southern memorial park would be a successful and important element to put in in stage 1.

THE CHAIR: Are you proposing that southern memorial would definitely include a crematorium, if it were to go ahead?

Father Wellspring: Southern memorial?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Father Wellspring: Yes, I think it would be important that southern memorial provided a whole gamut of options for dealing with a body, including things like natural burial, a lawn cemetery, monumental burial, cremation and places for interring ashes—the whole gamut. This needs to be thought through, because in our society, as I said, death for many people is very foreign. People grieve very individually. We need to, in a pluralistic society, provide those options.

Even at the moment we are still struggling as a society to come to terms with death. While I was away on holidays I read a book which I would recommend to you. It is called *How to Read a Graveyard*. It looks at the evolution of practices of cemeteries over the last 2,000 years. There is a whole section on what is going on in England today with the reality of cremation. The major sporting grounds are now putting up

signs saying, “It is illegal to scatter ashes here.” This is happening in other places as well. It is a failure of, dare I say it, the funeral industry and cemeteries to provide an appropriate place where people feel that they can grieve suitably.

What might some of these things look like? If somebody wants to scatter Uncle Bert on Manchester oval or whatever, it is all about the footy connection. Is there some way in which our cemeteries can have the appropriate memorial there for those who are connected to the football world? What would that look like, and how do we encourage that?

Here in the ACT we have had our own struggles with roadside memorials for people who have died in crashes. In a way, it is about a community struggling to come to terms with grief, struggling to know “how do I memorialise this person who I’ve loved and who’s special to me?” Again there is a whole area to be looked at, opened up and thought about. I think we are going to see the sorts of problems they are seeing in England. It is happening here in Australia already.

MR PARTON: How much of that is cost related? You have talked to us about the fact that for so many people death is foreign. I would love to know how many conversations you have had or you are aware of when it comes to the individual cost of burying someone. When people are confronted with that, do they say, “What, really?”

Father Wellspring: I think the cost is a significant issue. I had a parishioner here in Campbell, a man that, sadly, died this year, Gerry Birmingham. He was one of those outstanding Canberrans. He had spent his life driving buses. Just before he died he said to me, “Julian, my wife died a number of years ago, about 10 years ago. I had her cremated and I wanted to inter her ashes.” He was amazed that it cost about \$2,000 to inter ashes in our public cemeteries. Once he died, that was to be looked after and incorporated into the cost. I do think cost is a real issue for people. Again, it is about how we make our cemeteries accessible.

MR PARTON: From a cost perspective, for some that is nigh on impossible, isn’t it?

Father Wellspring: For some it would be, yes.

MR PARTON: With respect to the point that you made earlier, we buried my father earlier this year, back in my home town in Western Australia. The point that you made was so evident, in that you are dealing with this very foreign thing, because you have never gone through the experience. People are not in a position to haggle over price.

Father Wellspring: No.

MR PARTON: They just accept it: “Okay, that seems a bit dramatic, but I guess this is the way it is.”

Father Wellspring: Yes. Of course, the funeral industry itself is very labour intensive. That is a big part of it. Here in Canberra, at Woden, with respect to land, we have this whole structure. I am not an economist, but with the funding of a cemetery there

surely has to be a huge economic analysis to look at it, particularly if you have burial in perpetuity.

The ACT government has picked up a huge legacy burden from the commonwealth with both Woden and Gungahlin because there are many people who were buried out there, and any maintenance of the cemetery and any provision for the future was never factored into the up-front economic costs. You probably need a person like Chris Richardson to sit down and look at the model of funding of the cemeteries. I am not convinced that the model that we have works, but I am not an economist and I cannot really go into the detail of that. Others would be far more competent to look at that.

THE CHAIR: I have a question regarding cost. One of the things that have been floated in submissions is the idea of introducing tenure as a way to help with costs, because in perpetuity is obviously going to incur the largest cost. Do you have any views on tenure and whether tenure should be offered in ACT cemeteries?

Father Wellspring: Talking from a Catholic perspective in the first instance, and then maybe more generally, certainly, in terms of our Catholic Church, we would want to see the burial option in perpetuity remain in some way, shape or form in what is done. The idea of disturbing a grave, a sacred site, is something that, to Christian sensibilities, we are not keen on for people who were buried. More generally, I am aware that there is a move to limited tenure in other places. That could well be an option in the new southern memorial park; if that helps to contain costs, it is not an unreasonable way to go. I think you have to provide the option for people who might want perpetual burial.

THE CHAIR: Am I right in understanding that, if you have tenure, you would like to see one of the tenure options being in perpetuity? Would I be right in saying that?

Father Wellspring: Yes; that is correct.

MS CHEYNE: You said cremation was not that appealing in terms of Catholicism a while ago but that over time, and with societal attitudes changing, that has changed. Do you think that could ever happen in terms of land tenure? It seemed to me that similar principles were involved in terms of reservations.

Father Wellspring: I can see where you are coming from. It depends on what sort of land tenure we are talking about, because you can get land tenure where you get the grave for, say, 50 years, and there is an option for renewal and then another option for renewal. There can be land tenure where you get the grave for 50 years, then the whole thing is flattened and a new housing development is put up. So it depends on what you are talking about.

One of the things that Christians have done is re-use graves. There are often situations where somebody is buried and then at a later point they are exhumed, the bones are crushed down and the bones are interred. But a new burial takes place. We would be quite open to that kind of tenure, and the re-use of a grave in that way.

MS CHEYNE: You would be?

Father Wellspring: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: I did some research in my office and found that in Italy the Catholic population does that, out of necessity, due to limited land.

Father Wellspring: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: It is good to know that, in terms of renewability, there are some things that are probably less palatable and there are some things that are more palatable.

Father Wellspring: That is right. Certainly, that re-use makes a great deal of sense. When you go to some of the major cemeteries of the world and look at the vast amounts of land that are consumed by this, you think, “Can we keep on going like this?” One of the things that we are all more aware of is that we have to look at making sure that we have much more sustainable practices in what we do.

MS CHEYNE: Yes. Particularly when we are talking about the southern park, I know you note that start-up costs are considerable, and your wish list also makes those costs more considerable—lots of chapels, lots of facilities and things like that. Equally, sustainability, maintenance and re-use of plots potentially help the business case a little bit as well.

Father Wellspring: That is right. There is the whole thing of re-use. I think there will be limited tenure in any new ACT cemetery. That will probably be a sine qua non, whatever happens. With respect to some of the difficulties that you might have—and these are other people who I hope will present to you—Commonwealth War Graves undertake to maintain graves in perpetuity. What would that mean for any service people who will be interred in the new cemetery? I do not know.

I keep saying to myself, too, just to go back to the funding model: “Can we think laterally about the ways we do this?” I have spoken a little bit about the park concept and how that could be integrated more into the cemetery arrangements so that people think of going to the southern memorial park for a picnic or whatever. Going a step further, we could start thinking about how else we engage the community.

One of the things that interested me was in some way a bit of a surprise to me. As you know, Woden is done on a denominational basis, whereas at Gungahlin we are all in together. I was intrigued by the submission of Canberra Cemeteries, with respect to their consultation—that there was quite a high request in the community to keep the denominational element of things. I am thinking that people are identifying with their community, and, whatever is done at the southern memorial park, how do we engage with the community to take responsibility in some way for their deceased members? We have the Jewish community and the Islamic community; we have the Catholics—it goes on and on. How can we all be engaged and take responsibility for what happens?

Here is a quaint little idea. In Ireland, most of our Catholic churches would have a little cemetery attached to them, and they have what they call Cemetery Sunday. It is a Sunday when the community turns out and they clean up the graves and keep them all

neat and tidy. We do not want to go back to having burials at churches or anything like that, but it is about how we engage these communities to take responsibility and feel a connectedness.

I think there are ways of opening up those discussions as well, particularly if you go along denominational lines in the way the southern memorial park is planned. You could float it out there: what is the cost model? The other idea I had—and I know the federal government is not really keen on this—is whether a national Australian cemetery would have to necessarily be in the parliamentary triangle or whether it could be part of the southern memorial park.

Australians do not really grapple so well with death, and the whole idea of a national cemetery has never really gone anywhere. How do we honour the great leaders that we have, the people who make extraordinary contributions to our society, and then grieve for and memorialise them when they are gone? Is there a possibility and is it worth opening up that conversation when we look at the southern memorial park? That might get us a cut of some federal government money. I am being entirely—

MS CHEYNE: I think that might delay it into perpetuity.

Father Wellspring: It might do that as well, but I think to myself that it is a shame that we do not have a national cemetery.

MR PARTON: Yes, it is.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned in your submission that church groups or the private sector operators, from your observation, have had difficulty running cemeteries. I want to tease out what is informing this view. Could that view be taken to mean that the government should be the provider of future services within Canberra?

Father Wellspring: Going to your second question, the reality is that, when it comes to burial, there are all kinds of government regulations around the disposal of bodies. There is health legislation and, in the case of a cemetery, there are land and environment provisions and all those sorts of things. Even if you have a private operator, you have to police that. Also, if the private operator falls over, who is left with it at the end of the day? The government. Governments cannot win on this, I do not think. You can get a business operator who sets up with all the best intentions in the world. If he or she goes belly-up for some reason, the government is left to sort out the mess.

MR PARTON: They cannot just wash their hands of it and say—

Father Wellspring: Absolutely. In Victoria I think you will find they have opted that the state will look after cemeteries. I suppose my view on this has come from a few things, from travelling around overseas and looking at cemeteries run by the church. There is a cemetery in Belfast run by the church and it is just a mess. It is not kept up; it is a disaster.

Even here in Australia, we have had some difficulties with churches that have run cemeteries where people were not exactly accurate with their records about who had

been sold which plot, and different people were being sold the same plot two or three times. They are the kinds of horror stories that really should not happen and should not happen in our society today, with what we have technologically and otherwise.

My view would be that it should be done by the government. I think that the ACT cemeteries authority, by and large, has served the community very well. I put on the record that Hamish Horne has been an outstanding custodian of the whole enterprise here in Canberra. He is a man of great expertise, learning, foresight, planning and sensitivity. I think he has served our community well.

THE CHAIR: Just on that, one of the terms of reference goes to the governance model for ACT cemeteries. Given that you have just spoken quite highly of Hamish, am I right in understanding that you think the current governance model is quite good or would you like to see any amendments to the way—

Father Wellspring: I have to say, from my own experience, that it seems to be working fairly well. There may be other issues that other people have or that the government has with the model. With respect to any engagement I have had with the ACT cemeteries authority, in terms of being involved in organising funerals as well as in my contact and dealing with them, they have been highly professional and highly competent, and I think it does work.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone have any final questions?

MR PARTON: No. I think you have articulated your submission very well, in written form and in spoken form.

MS CHEYNE: Do you get asked for new technologies in services, such as digital access to burials at cemeteries or at the crematorium, particularly in tragic deaths?

Father Wellspring: These things are certainly becoming more requested. Indeed, I would expect that we will see an increase in that. I keep thinking about how disruptive technology affects the world of the cemetery. With digital memorialisation of people, what possibilities are there for the new cemetery in that?

MS CHEYNE: Do you think that is a way that there could be some cost recovery?

Father Wellspring: Streaming of services as well to other parts of the country—all of these things should be built into the new facilities and be possible. Certainly, yes, we are getting more requests for the use of what I call the multimedia world when it comes to memorialisation in our services.

THE CHAIR: On that note, thank you for your evidence. A copy of the *Hansard* transcript of the hearing will be sent to you soon. The *Hansard* for the hearing will be available on the website within the next week. The committee's next public hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, 11 October 2017 and a program for that hearing will be placed on the website before the hearing. Again, thank you very much.

Father Wellspring: Thank you again for your generosity in being here today and for all that you people do for the community. I am sure these are complex issues, and you

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have to work your way through many views and make a decision, so thanks for your hard work.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 11.55 am.