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Sarah Kearney
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Administration and Finance
Legislative Council
Parliament House,
Perth WA 6000

PUBLIC

21st October 03.

Inquiry into the Transfer of Management of the Fremantle Cemetery to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

The State Government decision to allow the Fremantle Cemetery to be taken over by the Metropolitan Cemetery Board has created a State Government controlled monopoly, unprecedented for the industry in this country. With the stroke of a pen the Gallop Government extinguished 104 years of Independent management of the Fremantle Cemetery. I ask - who will benefit from this decision?

It was allegedly made on the basis of economical grounds with a promised annual saving of \$600 000. However Fremantle Cemetery has never received Government funding. All the profits it has generated in the past have been put toward maintaining and developing the grounds, improving its facilities and service levels, while keeping a competitive pricing structure. This has contributed significantly to gains in market share over Karrakatta.

In 2001/02 a Government task force reviewed statutory authorities and at the time, proposed an amalgamation with the Metropolitan Cemetery Board. The WA Division of the Australian Funeral Directors Association opposed the merger and Fremantle Cemetery won its case for autonomy. A media release at the time stated a "submission by the Fremantle Cemetery Board on January 2002 clearly refutes the Ministers assertions that money will be saved by removing duplication and increasing efficiencies with all cemeteries being managed under one board". Now the Government has over-ruled this initial decision, without any further consultation with the funeral industry.

While the Minister, Tom Stephens has stated fees for the Cemetery will stay consistent with the CPI for the next 2 years – what about beyond that point? The Metropolitan Cemetery Board has a history of increasing prices after a merger. The acquisition of the Midland and Guildford Cemeteries resulted in a pricing policy, which does not reflect individual Cemetery conditions and service levels, with families now being charged the same fees as at the larger cemeteries at Karrakatta and Pinnaroo. In other words, the users of the two smaller cemeteries appear to be contributing unnecessarily to the running costs of larger cemeteries.

Having competing Cemetery Boards particularly for cremation, has been a significant factor in both cemeteries making substantial improvements to the facilities and services they provide. Competition has driven innovation, a situation that should be maintained. Competition in terms of cremation fees has been most beneficial to the consumer.

As the State General Manager of Service Corporation International – Australia, the States largest provider of Funeral Care (including the following brands - Purslowe Funeral Homes, Mareena Purslowe & Associates, Simplicity Funerals, Oakwood Funerals and Value Funerals) and as a fourth generation Funeral director with 30 years experience as well as being the Senior Vice President of the Australian Funeral Directors Association and Western Australia's first Master Funeral Director, I feel I am qualified to ask - who will benefit from this decision? The answer is nobody who wishes to use the services of Fremantle Cemetery or any other Perth cemetery for that matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin J. Purslowe', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Colin J Purslowe
State General Manager,
Service Corporation International – Australia Pty Ltd.