



Speech by

**Barbara Stone**

**MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD**

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## **FUNERAL INDUSTRY**

**Ms STONE** (Springwood—ALP) (11.41 am): At the last sitting I informed the House of a funeral industry forum being organised by Metropolitan Funerals. Firstly, I want to thank organiser and panel member, Mr Brian Gill, who is the general manager of Metropolitan Funerals. I thank other panel industry representatives who attended the forum, including Mrs Esther Swanborough, from Swanborough Funerals, who is President of the Independent Funeral Directors Association; Mr Alistair Shaw, career embalmer and funeral director for 30 years; Mr Robert Luscombe, who is the cemeteries service manager with the Sunshine Coast Regional Council and President of the Queensland Cemeteries and Crematoria Association; and representatives from the AFDA. I also thank the master of ceremonies, Ms Annette Lourigan, who is the community relations manager with Metropolitan Funerals, for doing a wonderful job on the day and for her hard work in organising the forum.

My colleague the member for Pumicestone attended with me. I know that this week she is meeting with an industry person to find out more about ecofriendly coffins. We both found the forum very informative and look forward to working with the industry in the future. Community members who attended included Logan Local Ambulance Committee members, Ipswich city councillors and individuals who had questions regarding the industry. I was very pleased with the number of people representing all areas of the industry who turned up on the day and put forward their views on the future of the industry and asked questions of the industry panellists.

I will now speak about some of the issues raised on the day. People can sometimes be very confused as to who is the executor of a will or who has legal responsibility for organising a funeral. The forum heard how funeral directors can have a number of different directors turn up to pick up a deceased person because family members have phoned different companies as they all believed they were the person responsible for doing so. Then they have to wait for proof of who is the executor. This can be a problem also when it comes to collecting ashes. Sometimes there can be a dispute as to the ownership of the ashes and people are told to seek legal advice. Both industry representatives and individuals gave details of their experiences with this matter and both would like to see a more simplified method of dealing with such issues.

Of course, green choices was an area that received lots of questions. Often funeral directors have to weigh up family members' wishes while trying to be good corporate citizens. A good example of this is when family members wish to release balloons, yet we know this is dangerous to our environment, especially to our sea creatures. Today as more alternative services are being requested, directors often have to balance the OH&S risks to their staff and risks to the environment while trying to provide the type of service the family requests.

We also heard about local government planning issues: what we will do in the future if space for cemeteries is not planned; who will pay for the cost of their maintenance as they become more and more costly for councils to continue to service; will more people be asking for green choices and will green cemeteries play a role in planning? Of course, the costs of funerals was well discussed and we all have different ideas about what we would call a simple funeral. It was suggested that people look at prearranged and prepaid funerals, as this could assist in allowing family members to know exactly what the person

wants. It was suggested that people look at this as if it were any other major purchase. I believe that as Australians we are not comfortable doing this. It is only recently that the nation started talking publicly about organ donation, but I think the time has come for Australians to take more notice of this subject and they should plan and discuss with family members details of their expectations for their funerals or have it prearranged. People do not really know what they are paying for and they only see a casket at the service on the day. We do not understand the industry and we need more information. I have suggested to the industry that it print a brochure where the minimum requirements—that is, the must-do items—are explained and priced. The brochure would then explain the add-on services and costs so that people can make an informed decision about what they think would be a simple funeral.

The forum also dealt with the matter of regulation. Currently there is no comprehensive regulation of the funeral industry in Queensland, although there are miscellaneous provisions across a number of portfolios that have an impact on the industry. On the day it was clear that the industry wants transparency. Many believe that a code of conduct would assist people in understanding what it is the industry does. For example, many people do not know that it can take 40 hours of work to prepare for a funeral. The industry wants to talk about moving down the regulation path. It wants to talk about standards, training and qualifications for staff, staff safety and public safety and doing the best to make sure the public gets the best service possible. The industry does not want small family owned firms pushed out of the industry. It wants them to survive and it wants the large companies to work alongside them. I look forward to meeting with the Attorney-General and representatives of the industry next month to start communication between this government and the industry as it progresses down this path.