



Speech by

**Barbara Stone**

**MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD**

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## **FUNERAL INDUSTRY**

**Ms STONE** (Springwood—ALP) (12.15 pm): At a time when everyone is talking about how to be green, our thoughts usually go to saving water, recycling our rubbish, cutting back on our energy use and other things around the house we can do to be greener. Today I am going to speak about another part of the cycle of life where we can be green: death. In Canada each year more than 320,000 litres of embalming chemicals, 150,000 tonnes of reinforced concrete, nine tonnes of steel and three million board feet of hardwoods are buried in Canadian cemeteries. Most are derived from materials used just once, and I would think this description is probably accurate for Australia's cemeteries. With the increase in our population, cemeteries have become vast acres with all care left to the councils and the trusts that look after them. With the growing popularity of cremation memorial walls, manicured lawns and perfect pest-free gardens have become part of our urban landscape.

I put this to members today: as Queenslanders who care about our environment, can we continue to afford not to look at funeral practices and the impact they have on our environment? As responsible Queenslanders, we need to encourage the use of coffins that emit less greenhouse gases when cremated and no poisonous chemicals when buried.

As Queenslanders we need to ensure that people have the right to carry out their funeral wishes depending on their personal, cultural or traditional practices and ensure that their body disposal has as little impact on the environment as possible. Yet with all of the changes that have happened in the funeral industry in the last 60 years, people still ask to be buried in a simple cardboard box under the shade of a big old tree. In the UK, USA, Canada and many other countries, this desire is becoming a reality as more and more natural bush cemeteries become an asset to the natural environment they are a part of. Natural bush cemeteries allow for people to be buried with minimum impact on the earth and provide the earth with the natural nutrients to rejuvenate plant growth and encourage the continuing sanctuary of the native flora and fauna that are suffering at our increasing need to urbanise our bushland.

Australia currently has three working natural bush cemeteries: one in Tasmania, one in South Australia and one in Lismore. Unlike the lawn cemetery, there is not the constant need to use pesticides or mow. Precious metals, rare timbers or toxic chemicals cannot be buried within the grounds. People who chose green burials understand and welcome the fact that they can only be buried in a shroud or coffin made from natural organic materials such as untreated plantation timber, woven wicker or recycled cardboard. They also respect that no cements or marbles will be used to mark their final resting place. They accept that, with respect to their surrounding bushland, stone native to the area can only be used for their burial markers. However, the savvy techno can have a GPS device placed in their hands so their families can return to honour the bushland settings and their loved one.

The Gold Coast City Council is in the preliminary stages of starting Queensland's first natural bushland cemetery, and I am told the natural burial site will be on the site of an old quarry to be filled with suitable soil so that bodies can decompose and provide valuable nutrients so as to encourage the rejuvenation of native flora. Encouraging the Queensland funeral industry and cemeteries to include ecofriendly options for families is not difficult. Coffins made from recycled cardboard and woven wicker and

burial shrouds are already available in Queensland. Sadly, in Queensland last year, out of the 24,500 coffins that were used fewer than 100 of them would have been sound ecochoices.

In the USA, nearly 75 per cent of coffins are made of steel and many coffins are lined with copper or zinc. Approximately 200 million pounds of steel are used in caskets each year. Eco-friendly coffins such as LifeArt coffins are available in Australia. They use 90 per cent less virgin wood fibre than a traditional coffin. These coffins are made from up to 97 per cent recovered fibre waste, such as post-consumer recycled paper and sugarcane waste. They do not contain adhesives that release formaldehyde. Testing has shown that they release significantly fewer carbon emissions into the environment—in fact, half the emissions of a standard coffin.

A virtual carbon-neutral crematorium is operational in South Australia, but I do not believe that Queensland's crematoriums can make that claim. As Queensland's population is growing and we are an ageing population, inevitably we will see an increase in deaths per annum. So I say to members that the next time someone says to them that they want to be buried in a cardboard box under a shady tree they should tell them that they can. I ask members to remind people that they can do that and people will thank them for helping to ensure that future generations can enjoy our environment.