

# Cemetery 'care lack' anger

By Cameron Hill

VISITORS who regularly tend the graves of loved ones at Dandenong Cemetery are upset at the lack of maintenance in the oldest part of the cemetery.

Last Wednesday *The Journal* was shown ugly mounds of dirt, left from graves dug long ago, uncut grass and a broken tap in the Kirkham Road cemetery's Catholic section.

Seniors, including Veronica Sturug, 68, who for decades has visited the grave of her baby son at the back of the cemetery, are forced to walk more than 100 metres to get water for the flowers she lovingly places on the grave on every visit.

"The Catholic and Russian areas are just neglected, the grass is never cut and they always give the same excuse — that it's too wet," she said.

Janina — who didn't want her second name used — is puzzled why a large pile of clay, with rubbish-strewn grass growing out of it, is still lying near her brother's grave.

"It really upsets my mother. My brother was buried two years ago and that's the dirt they removed from his plot," she said.

The cemetery is overseen by a cash-strapped three-member volunteer trust comprising Greater Dandenong councillors



**Facing the music:** John Kelly listens to Veronica Sturug's concerns.

**Pictures:** Lucy Di Paolo

John Kelly (chairman), Kevin Walsh, and Youhorn Chea.

Springvale Necropolis administers the cemetery and digs the graves on the trust's behalf and the council has agreed to do maintenance for the next five years.

A group supporting the intellectually impaired is hired to cut grass at low cost.

Cr Kelly said that while the trust would love to see maintenance carried out at a level acceptable to all, the reality was that it lacked finances.

"As a Catholic chairman of the cemetery I can say for certain that section has not been forgotten . . . my grandfather is buried here. We've got three trustees, we're volunteers; we

don't have a bucket load of money to do maintenance. Historically, the previous trust, as much as they were doing a good job, never raised enough money to maintain it properly."

Cr Kelly said there was no excuse for the mound left near Janina's brother's grave. The council had just accepted a \$4000 quote to renew piping

and fix the cemetery's taps.

There are about 2000 burial plots still available at the cemetery and Necropolis chief executive Russ Allison said 10 to 20 graves were dug each year.

"Our responsibility is for the

taking of bookings, pre-purchase of graves and the digging and filling of graves." He said that, traditionally, the day-to-day maintenance had always been the council's responsibility.