

# Let's bury this plan

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

The proponent of a controversial memorial cemetery on Dandenong Creek floodplains has broken its silence.

In a short statement on 8 March, Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust stated: "SMCT is engaged in consultation with the City of Greater Dandenong regarding the technical aspects of a proposed new memorial park."

On the same day, Greater Dandenong Council upped its "strong, unequivocal opposition" to the proposed development at 1564 Heatherton Road based on a briefing from the SMCT.

In a statement, Mayor Jim Memeti said the council wrote to Planning Minister Richard Wynne and Water Minister Lisa Neville calling for their "direct intervention" to ensure the development does not proceed.

"Council is unconvinced that this site chosen for the proposed memorial park is an appropriate one, nor in the best location for this use."

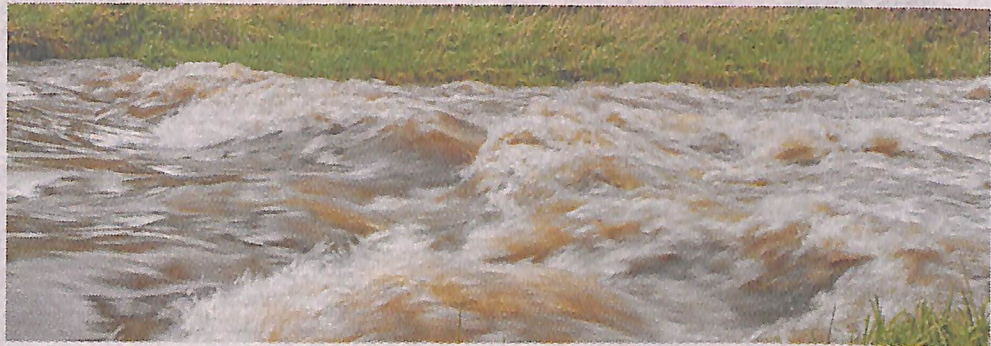
The site, owned by Melbourne Water, is part of "95 hectares of sensitive environmental habitat within wetlands and floodplains", mayor Jim Memeti said.

It's covered by a Land Subject to Inundation Overlay, and zoned in parts as an Urban Floodway Zone, Public Use Zone 1 and Public Conservation and Resource Zone.

"Flood mitigation for Dandenong and the downstream areas, and the role the wetlands in the vicinity of 1564 Heatherton Road play in biodiversity and habitat are very important to this Council," Cr Memeti said.

The council is also concerned about being sidelined by the State Government in the planning decision process.

Its role could be reduced to "providing a referral comment" and "formulating a submission", which would be "completely unacceptable to Greater Dandenong City Council and



A hard-flowing Dandenong Creek near the proposed cemetery site. 244720 Picture: GARY SISSONS

our community," Cr Memeti said.

"Council is pleading for the direct intervention of both or any Minister in this matter as the proposed development within environmentally sensitive land cannot be permitted to proceed.

"We respectfully request that any proposed Planning Scheme Amendment should not be accepted by the State Government and this council requests as a matter of urgency the opportunity to discuss this matter with any Minister."

A Victorian Government spokesperson said the council and Mr Wynne had not received an application from the SMCT about the site.

"As no application has been received, no decision has been made about the potential planning assessment and approval pathway."

According to the State Government, there are "ongoing" negotiations about the site's future use and ownership between the site's owner Melbourne Water and the SMCT.

The proposal, being a public project, would be ineligible for the Development Facilitation Program – and the council would be consulted if it's referred to Mr Wynne.

Melbourne Water, as the floodplains manager, would have to ensure adequate flood mitigations during construction and long-term before

the application would proceed.

Community groups have been outraged by the cemetery plan.

It has been identified as a key wildlife corridor and bird-watching "hot spot" of 77 bird species, according to the Greater Dandenong Environment Group.

Greens candidate for Bruce and former Greater Dandenong councillor Matthew Kirwan said the wetlands were a flood protection "safety valve" set up in response to past floods in central Dandenong and a Royal Commission.

Flood historian Alan Hood said an elevated cemetery would act like a "massive bathplug" in the bowl-like flood basin.

"Future floods would result in higher water levels, flooding more houses upstream."

SMCT has been searching for a further site to add to its nine cemeteries in the South East.

Three of its current cemeteries – Springvale, Dandenong and Bunurong – are in Greater Dandenong.

After a further enquiry from Star Journal, SMCT stated: "SCMT will be able to provide more information on the proposal once this consultation process (with City of Greater Dandenong) is complete."