



MEDIA RELEASE

'Independent' Planning Commission's approval of a Crown cemetery at Varroville in the Scenic Hills Environmental Protection Area

On Friday 19 July 2019, the Sydney Western City Planning Panel hastily signed off the directive of the **Independent Planning Commission** to approve a 136,000 grave Crown Cemetery at Varroville before the land could be listed on the State Heritage Register.

We are devastated by this decision and still reeling from the brutality of the Planning Commission's procedures and the tactics used by the **Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust**.

We are deeply disappointed that the **Jewish Board of Deputies** would join the **Sydney Catholic Archdiocese** in forcing this cemetery on our community.

The Commission did not even *acknowledge* the destructive impact of the cemetery on the life and work of the **Carmelite Monasteries** and their Retreat Centre, that state significant cultural heritage will be merely recorded before being destroyed, and that the owners of the **Varro Ville Homestead's** investment has been wiped out. The Commission used a superseded report to approve the removal of critically endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland, and has given no explanation for ignoring groundwater impacts that do not meet **World Health Organisation Guidelines**. The Commission's claim that the *Metropolitan Sydney Cemetery Capacity Report 2017* supports the choice of this location is patently untrue and an insult to the intelligence of this community. As is the claim that the cemetery complies with the Campbelltown Local Environment Plan. This goes to the integrity of the Commission's assessment.

Integrity in the process has been further undermined by political interference. **Premier Gladys Berejiklian** openly did not want a proposed cemetery in the Liberal electorate of Mulgoa (concurrently before the Commission) but allowed successive Ministers to breach the *Heritage Act 1977* by withholding approval to list the Varroville land on the State Heritage Register (as recommended in 2017 by the **Heritage Council of NSW** and the **National Trust**) thus facilitating the unimpeded approval of this cemetery in the Labor electorate of Macquarie Fields. The Commission declined our request, sent on our behalf by EDO NSW, to *not* make this decision until after the land was heritage listed. The Commission's decisions have delivered a win for the Premier, suggesting that the Commission is not 'independent' of government and should remove this hypocrisy from its name.

The bona fides of those purporting to speak for multicultural communities in support of this cemetery was never examined.

Our trust in the planning system is at zero.

The fight to preserve our Scenic Hills against this cemetery will continue. The CMCT and its followers are **not welcome** here.