

## *The Australian*

### VC graves 'under threat' of reclamation

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Sandra Playle by war graves in Perth's Karrakatta cemetery. Picture: Marie Nirme

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DESCENDANTS of Victoria Cross winners have backed a push to have their relatives' gravesites heritage-listed in the lead-up to the Anzac centenary celebrations to protect them from ever being removed or destroyed.

Researcher Sandra Playle, who helped name hundreds of unknown Australian soldiers in mass graves in Fromelles, and the state opposition are concerned that the graves of seven Australian VC recipients across Western Australia are in jeopardy because the burial rights have expired.

Heritage Minister Albert Jacob strongly rejected suggestions the graves were under threat as a "cheap political shot", saying they were protected under an agreement between the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board and the Office of Australian War Graves.

Ms Playle and Labor said that did not go far enough — they feared the remains could be exhumed or headstones taken away to accommodate new gravesites. Ms Playle has applied to the Heritage Council of Western Australia for the seven plots and that of one New Zealand recipient to be put on its register.

"I want the VC graves heritage-listed as a centenary project," Ms Playle said. "I figure it's an obligation. It should have been a matter of due process."

Relatives of VC recipients Hugo Throssell, buried at Karrakatta, and Leslie Thomas Starceвич, buried at Esperance cemetery, on the state's south coast, also want the graves heritage-listed.

Starcevich's daughter, Lynette Starcevich, said the gravesites helped people remember all soldiers. "My father said he didn't win the Victoria Cross for himself, he won it for everyone else who was not recognised. In preserving his gravesite and those of others, then that is like a memory stone," she said.

Throssell's granddaughter, Karen Throssell, said his grave was left to decay for years because of his anti-war stance after returning home from Gallipoli and the Middle East in 1918.

But the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board insisted its memorandum of understanding with the Office of Australian War Graves to retain official war graves included those of VC recipients. The board's chief executive, Peter Deague, said it was the same as heritage protection: "I don't specifically know what Sandra's trying to achieve because what she's stating is what's occurring."

Ms Playle said the MOU was "baseless" and the Office of Australian War Graves had no jurisdiction over state laws, which allowed for gravesites' "renewal".

State Opposition Leader Mark McGowan said the MOU was not enough to protect the graves.

**Original article:**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/defence/vc-graves-under-threat-of-reclamation/news-story/d9d36e5c656bfd197d77dcec8a8355a4>