

Elders in noisy protest at Karrakatta burial place

Elders clashed at a ceremony to commission a new Aboriginal burial place in Karrakatta cemetery this week.

Noongar community elders attempted to drown out a speech by Aboriginal site registrar Irene Stainton. Aboriginal Affairs Minister Kim Hames and other elders at the ceremony.

One angry elder even threatened to point the bone at another who was conducting a smoking ceremony for the new burial place.

Swan Valley Noongar elder Clarrie Isaacs said he protested because the burial site was not sacred.

He said it had been established without full consultation with WA Aboriginal elders.

He also said he believed the new site had been put there so Aboriginal remains could be easily moved there to get them out

Report and pictures
By EMMA CHADWICK

of the way of land development.

Mr Isaacs said: "I see the real purpose is when developers find an Aboriginal body, they will take it off the land and put it here and just keep clearing the land."

Positive

Aboriginal Affairs CEO Haydn Lowe slammed the protesters saying the burial site should be seen as a positive move.

He said: "There is an overwhelming positive here, please do not let this incident throw a cloud over this ceremony and please do not devalue Aboriginal people by these groups."

Mr Lowe said 16 members of the Aboriginal cultural material committee were at the ceremony and they had been the consultation point for the burial site.

Dr Hames said the burial place, built into a mound of earth with steps down to two wooden entrance doors, was a temporary "keeping place" to house Aboriginal remains which could not be buried because their source was not known.

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ABOVE: Ken Colbung at the entrance to the 'keeping place'. LEFT: Tempers flared around the smoking ceremony. Protesting elder Judy Jackson (front) faced up to Ken Colbung, Kim Hames and a security officer.



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Noisy protest

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He said it could hold the remains of up to 250 people, including up to 100 stored in a room at the WA Museum.

He said: "The keeping place will also be used for remains waiting to be taken back to their tribal lands for reburial.

"The Aboriginal community has wished for a facility such as this for some time, where the remains of their people can be held with dignity and respect."

Combined

He said the project had been four years in the making and was a combined initiative by the Aboriginal Affairs Department and the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

Mr Hames said protesters had also tried to disrupt the first war memorial to honour indigenous Australians who fought in wars for their country, which was dedicated at King's Park last Saturday.