

**Submission  
No 45**

## **INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY**

**Organisation:** Community Relations Commission  
**Name:** Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian  
**Position:** Chairperson  
**Telephone:** 02 8255 6767  
**Date Received:** 1/07/2005

---

**Theme:**

**Summary**

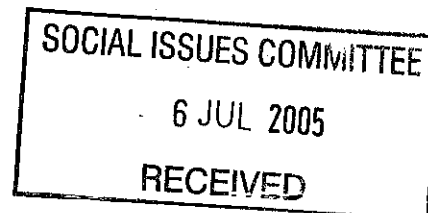
# Community Relations Commission

For a multicultural NSW

Our Ref: PG 6794  
File Ref: 05/0196

- 1 JUL 2005

Ms Susan Want  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
NSW Parliament  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000



**Head Office**  
Level 8, Stockland House  
175-183 Castlereagh Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
PO Box A2618  
Sydney South NSW 1235  
Tel: (02) 8255 6767  
TTY: (02) 8255 6758  
Fax: (02) 8255 6868

**Wollongong Office**  
84 Crown Street  
Wollongong NSW 2500  
PO Box 363  
Wollongong NSW 2520  
Tel: (02) 4226 8480  
Fax: (02) 4226 8482

**Newcastle Office**  
Government Office Block  
117 Bull Street  
Newcastle NSW 2300  
Tel: (02) 4929 4191  
Fax: (02) 4929 7369

**Website**  
[www.crc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au)  
ABN 79 863 510 875



Dear Ms Want

I write with regard to the current Parliamentary Inquiry into the funeral industry and in particular terms of reference (e) which requires the inquiry to consider:

“the adequacy of legislation in meeting community needs.”

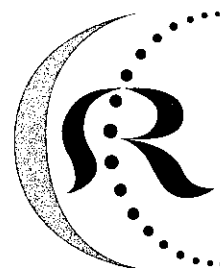
At a consultation with Pacific Island communities on 8 September 2004, concern was expressed by these communities that they are no longer able to bury people in accordance with their cultural requirements.

Specifically, in Pacific Island culture, those who attend a funeral are required to fill in the grave once the casket has been lowered into it. Community members advised the Commission that in recent times they have been told that they can no longer do this. This is causing further distress at an already difficult time for members of these communities.

The community advises that this issue arose on 31 July 2004 at a funeral conducted by Mitacare Funeral Services, at the Forest Lawn Cemetery, Cambden Valley Way, Leppington. Pacific Island communities have also reported similar difficulties at funerals held in the Rookwood Anglican Cemetery (Maori section) and the Pinegrove Memorial Park, Minchinbury.

The Commission has alerted the Department of Health and the Cemeteries and Crematoria Association of NSW of the communities concerns, however the matter is yet to be resolved to either the satisfaction of the Commission or the community.

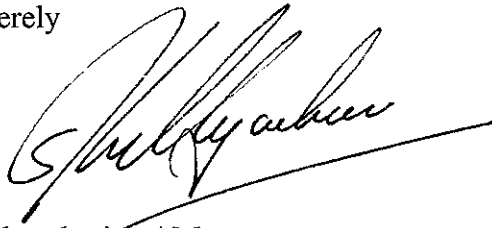
The Commission is also aware that the Sabian Mandeian community has special needs in relation to the handling and burial of its community members. These include wrapping the body in a shroud, placing the body in a special casket of bamboo and leaves and having the casket carried by religious leaders only. The community has faced considerable difficulty in being able to maintain their burial practices, in accordance with legislative requirements.



The concerns of the community have, however, been resolved for the present through compromises, reached by negotiation with the NSW Department of Health, which for example provide for the use of disposable coffins during funeral services.

The Commission recommends that, if there are any proposed new regulations arising from the inquiry, the specific needs of smaller religious communities be taken into account.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stepan Kerkyasharian', written over a horizontal line.

Stepan Kerkyasharian AM  
**Chairperson**