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COMMUNITY FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE BURIAL

An online community forum will begin next week on proposed sustainable burial practices designed to better manage the needs of a growing population in NSW.

Minister for Lands, Tony Kelly, said the forum follows the release of a discussion paper and the receipt of submissions into a wide range of options in the Sydney Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA).

“The submissions show the option of limited and renewable tenure has general support and would deliver the best results in terms of a sustainable future for existing and new public cemeteries, while delivering new affordable and accessible choices for families,” the Minister said.

“Limited and renewable tenure would only apply to new cemetery sites or new sections within existing cemeteries.

“Under the proposal, grave sites would be purchased for a set period, such as 25 or 50 years, with the option for the holder to renew.

“If families decide not to renew tenure, the site can be re-used by the cemetery authority sometime in the future.”

Approximately a quarter of Australia’s population lives in Sydney’s GMA and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has estimated more than 245,000 grave sites will be required by 2020, based on population growth, death rates and a static proportion of cremations to the number of deaths (approximately two-thirds).

Around 680,000 grave sites were available in the GMA in 2002, so this means more than a third of the currently available grave sites are likely to be used by about 2020, with critical shortages by 2036 and all currently available grave sites possibly used by 2050.

Mr Kelly said the problem of land supply is not immediate but there is a need to start acting now to make sure we are ready in time to manage the issue in the future.

“The introduction of limited and renewable tenure has the potential to significantly extend the life of existing public cemetery land, while new areas for cemeteries are being identified and investigated for longer term use,” the Minister said.

“Limited tenure could also deliver new and more affordable burial options for many families by providing an alternative to more costly permanent tenure.

“Permanent tenure will remain available to accommodate individual preferences and to take into account particular religious requirements and customs.

“Heritage and war grave issues will also be accommodated.”

The online discussion forum will start on 18 October at www.lpma.nsw.gov.au