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Media Release

Proposed resumption of heritage-listed market gardens

I am appalled at the suggestion that 60 per cent of the state heritage-listed Chinese market gardens at La Perouse/Phillip Bay are to be resumed to allow for the expansion of the neighbouring cemetery.

Market gardens have been a feature of the Randwick local government area since the 1840s. In fact the first mayor of the Municipality of Randwick was an English migrant market gardener. In view of their location, within easy reach of central Sydney, gardens at Randwick and Coogee continued to be cultivated throughout the 19th century. It was essential for Sydneysiders to be able to source fresh vegetables close to where they lived, something that is still most desirable, especially in view of the environmental impact of 'food miles'.

Chinese market gardeners have been a highly visible group in Sydney for more than 100 years and have had a presence in Randwick since at least the 1890s. The remaining gardens at La Perouse are a remnant of what was once a widespread phenomenon across the Sydney basin. In the interwar years their presence increased markedly, albeit temporarily, in places such as Ryde where Chinese men often farmed agricultural land abandoned by 'Anglo' cultivators.

The presence of Chinese market gardeners in the southern part of the Randwick local government area has long been noted. In the 1920s, for example, one family harvested flax that Chinese market gardeners had planted years before. Unemployed people who lived in shanties in the La Perouse area during the 1930s depression bartered fish for vegetables with Chinese gardeners. Many of the children recalled their kindness. The extensive network of gardens almost disappeared in the post-war years as suburban development encroached. Large Chinese market gardens located in Wassell Street Matraville, for example, ceased operations in the late 1950s.

It is important that the gardens at La Perouse be retained, not only for the vegetables produced there, but also because they represent a long tradition of intensive agriculture in the Sydney basin practised by a community whose contribution to Australian culture has only begun to be acknowledged over the last two decades.

For further information concerning the criteria under which these gardens are listed in the State Heritage Inventory go to http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5044696

Pauline Curby, professional historian and author of *Randwick*, Randwick Council, 2009

