

# Conflict pushes up cost of dying

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Page 2 | Section: General

210cm on the page



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Australians mourning the loss of their loved ones will have to pay more to farewell them as the fuel crisis forces funeral homes to raise their prices.

Scott Duncombe, 52, owns funeral companies in Sydney, Brisbane, the Gold Coast and across regional NSW. After seeing fuel prices rocket, he has had to put up the price of transport and hearse use by up to 10 per cent.

"Every part of our business involved a vehicle ... so we're seeing our fuel bills increase dramatically, especially in the regional areas," he said. "One of our vehicles we normally fill up for \$150 was \$220 yesterday. That's \$70 that you've got to take off the bottom line."

Rising supply chain costs are also being passed on to Mr Duncombe and putting pressure on his businesses.

"All of our deliveries that we get, from the coffins, flowers, all the elements of the mortuary, (the suppliers) are all having to put up their prices because of the cost of delivery," he said.

"We get hit with their increased prices ... and then have to pass that on to our (grieving) families."

Despite spending more than usual across his businesses' opera-



Duncombe

tions, Mr Duncombe said he was determined to raise prices "by the smallest amount possible, to not impact families too much".

"This element, the transfer or hearse vehicle, will slightly increase, but everything else will remain the same," he said. "But if prices keep on going up for other elements, such as florists, then ... we may need to up it a little bit overall."

"Nobody likes to have price increases, especially when it comes to funerals, but this is outside of our control. It's external forces that are making us (do it)."

Funerals Australia chief executive Dale Gilson said he was yet to see widespread price hikes in the industry, but providers would likely be forced to raise prices if the fuel crisis dragged on.

"It's fairly early days ... but what's happening is global, worldwide, and the funeral industry will

be impacted just like any other," Mr Gilson said.

Funerals Australia has written to the federal government asking to be recognised as an essential service and guaranteed access to fuel, Mr Gilson said.

"Funeral service providers are an essential community service and play a critical role in supporting families at the time of death and need to be recognised in this way," he said. "In many regional and remote parts of Australia, funeral directors are required to travel considerable distances, often hundreds of kilometres ... Reliable access to fuel is therefore fundamental to ensuring these essential services can continue."

Mr Gilson said funeral services risked becoming inaccessible to some people, particularly those in the regions, without affordable fuel access.

Mr Duncombe said he hoped the higher prices would be temporary but conceded he was prepared to increase them further if the fuel crisis persisted.

"We're going to monitor it so that if it all dies down and it gets back to normal, then we can bring those prices back down," he said. "But if (fuel costs) double again, for instance, then of course we will have to (increase prices). We just need to monitor it."