

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**6 October 2006**

# **SIEVX EVENT TO GO AHEAD, BUT ONLY FOR A DAY**

A group of over 200 churches and schools from around the country, hoping to create the SIEVX Memorial exhibit on the Canberra Lakeshore are still waiting for word from the NCA if their three week exhibition can go ahead, according to organizers.

The sinking of the SIEVX in 2001 was the worst maritime disaster in our region since World War two, and mostly involved women and children who made up the passenger load of the overcrowded boat.

A ceremony for the fifth anniversary of the tragedy is being opened by Chief Minister Jon Stanhope on Sunday, 15 October at Weston Park. Large wooden poles decorated by school students around the country will be raised to show the planned design of a permanent memorial.

The design features a procession of poles from the water's edge and stretching over 300 metres of hillside at Weston Park in Yarralumla. The poles are each named for one of the children and parents who died on the vessel, and each pole is an individual artwork sent by a different school, church or community group.

Canberra's complex administrative environment means that the group can proceed with the ceremony, which has been approved by Canberra City Parks. However, the standing of the poles for a further three weeks, allowing Canberrans to visit the artwork and learn more about the tragedy, is still in doubt due to Federal Government uncertainty over how to classify the event.

Psychologist Steve Biddulph, who began the project four years ago, said that: "We have been talking to the National Capital Authority and other authorities since 2003 to make sure the project goes smoothly.

"But we were shocked several weeks ago, when the NCA classified the three week exhibition as a permanent work, requiring a ten year waiting period. The group have asked for clarification of the guidelines, since they do not normally apply to temporary art exhibitions."

Project director Beth Gibbings has seen it grow from a small group meeting in a church hall to thousands of student artists and supporters all over the country.

"We are simply asking to stand up these poles up for three weeks, so that Canberrans can view the artwork in their own time. There will be several thousand very disappointed school students and church groups, travelling to Canberra to see their work displayed. Without permission, we can only stand up the poles by hand, for about ten minutes."

The Memorial Project arose among Uniting Church congregations across the country who felt the loss of life on SIEVX was too great to go unremembered, and felt responsible for Australia's role in the tragedy.

Many of the women and children who died had fathers detained here in Australia, leaving them vulnerable and without support, easy prey for the people smuggling scam which took their lives.

The project quickly grew to include other denominations and other faiths, and has been welcomed by survivors and bereaved fathers of the families lost, who will participate in the ceremony.

**Contact: [dpforest@bigpond.com](mailto:dpforest@bigpond.com) (Steve Biddulph) or Beth Gibbings on 0428 622 309**

**A high resolution image of the proposed memorial is available on request.**