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**By Ruth Ostrow**

As the country mourns the tragic loss of four teenagers aged 16 and 17 who were killed in a car accident near Byron Bay last month, the Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) has put forward a draft proposal that recommends roadside tributes such as wreaths and letters be removed by councils after six weeks.

The proposal reminds councils that by law, people must obtain a permit to place a memorial on a road or footpath, or face a penalty of up to \$5000 for "altering a road". The LGA says that rather than councils continuing to turn a blind eye to flowers and crosses, it wants a unified state-wide policy which strikes a balance between the needs of mourners and concerns about risks to road safety, liability issues and complaints from residents.

There's no mention of the road safety and liability issues associated with the huge, distracting advertising billboards and endless signs that pollute the Australian landscape, which former prime minister Paul Keating, to his credit, has been lobbying hard against recently.

I have written before about a posy of flowers tied to a tree near my home in memory of a young child who was run over on her way to school. It is vigilantly maintained by her loved ones and has been there for more than a year. Each time I pass I'm inspired to think about the preciousness of life, and to feel a sense of gratitude for my own child's safety as well as sympathy for the girl's parents. It makes me more human, and for that I'm deeply moved.

It also reminds me to drive more carefully, in direct contrast to what the LGA is suggesting.

Ultimately the LGA's proposal shows how little respect many in this community have for the process of grieving.

Who's to say how long it takes to mend a broken heart? This week marks the 13th anniversary of my father's death and I still cry often for his passing. It is ludicrous and offensive for local government to intrude on personal grief for no justifiable reason - especially given the plethora of other distractions on or by the road.

People need to erect sacred tributes as a way of expressing our humanity. Each flower is an altar, and more beautiful than any road sign. There are hallowed grounds that government bodies should not enter. Telling us how, when and where to grieve is one of them.

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