

Cross ceremony at Bogey Hole

KOTARA man Peter Cheros and his young family knew 2009 was full of promise but the future is looking even brighter after he claimed the cross in the Greek Orthodox Community's blessing of the water at the Bogey Hole yesterday.



CEREMONY: TOP LEFT: Young men dive for the cross in the Bogey Hole yesterday. TOP: THE VICTOR: Below, Peter Cheros, of Kotara, holds the cross aloft yesterday. LEFT: BLESSING: Bottom, Father Nicholas Scordilis throws the cross into the water. - Pictures by Kitty Hill

The ceremony, performed by Orthodox Greeks across the world, blesses the sea when a silver cross is hurled into the water and young men swim to retrieve it.

really excited," he said.

Greek Orthodox Parish of Newcastle rector Father Nicholas Scordilis said the ceremony stems from the Mediterranean where Greeks would pray for calm waters and good weather, but Australian summers are more suited to the ritual than Greek winters.

Held on the Sunday closest to January 6, the day of Epiphany, the one who claims the cross ensures a happy and healthy year ahead for him and his loved ones.

"In this country it is no problem, rather a joy, to go out in the water," he said.

Mr Cheros said his wife Marilen, and five-month-old daughter Adriana, had cheered him on and would benefit from the good fortune.

"We pray for the safety of our leaders of our country and the safety and progress of the Australian people."

"We've just had a baby girl so we are



Hundreds of Australians stranded in Fiji

Hundreds of Australian tourists remain stranded by flooding in the Fijian tourist hub of Nadi and outlying resorts, after storms lashed the popular Pacific island destination.



Fiji authorities have declared a state of emergency in areas affected by the persistent tropical storm, which has killed seven people and displaced more than 9,000.

Hundreds of holiday-makers, mostly from Australia and New Zealand, have been unable to leave island beach resorts in the country's west and north, or the flooded tourist centre of Nadi, where roads to the country's international airport remain closed to all vehicles except four wheel drives.

A spokeswoman for Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said about 1,000 Australians were officially registered as holidaying in Fiji, but it was still unknown how many had their holiday disrupted by the weather.

"Our high commission in Fiji is in contact with Fiji's National Disaster Management Office, which is currently advising stranded tourists to stay where they are," the spokeswoman said.

"The high commission is also in contact with some of the larger resorts on the Coral Coast, who are

advising their guests to remain at the resort for now."

Disaster office spokesman Pajiliai Dobui said power supplies were cut, drinking water was restricted and telephone lines were down in some places.

While the airport was open, many international flight departures were heavily delayed and tourists were still having difficulty reaching the terminal, he said.

"The road is open but that's not a good sign really. It's only because the tide is low so we're trying to get people through," Mr Dobui said.

"We've been helping tourists over flooded rivers and flooded roads in order to help them meet their flight schedules."

Rain continues in most regions and weather forecasts indicate the situation would not improve in the next week, with more heavy rain on the horizon.

"Tourists will unfortunately have to be very patient because there's very little we can do except watch and wait," he said.

"For most, their holidays have been ruined because of this weather but we're hoping it hasn't been too difficult for them."

Travel advice updated on Sunday night recommends that Australians travelling to Fiji in cyclone season contact their tour operator to check whether tourist services at their planned destination have been affected.

Greeks pushing for new aged care beds

DARWIN'S Greek community is planning to enter the Top End aged care market.

The Greek Orthodox community is working on plans to apply for special Federal Government loans to set up its own aged care facility. But community president John Nicolakis said it would not just be for people of Greek heritage.

"It will be for anybody that wishes to come along," he said.

Mr Nicolakis said they had received a lot of help from Federal Member for Solomon Damian Hale.

"The money has been approved - it's only a matter of us putting the application in," he said.

Darwin's Greek identity Tony Miaoudis has been involved in developing the project for several years.

He said there was "more demand" in the Top End than what the Federal Government thought, because more elderly were choosing to stay in the Territory and Darwin's multicultural communities found it hard to put their elderly into aged care.

He said there would be strong interest for a facility that was run by a community which placed great importance on the family.

The community's committee plans to apply for the mid-year round of the Federal Government's zero real interest loans, but expects the project will take at least two years.

It will conduct a feasibility study on sites and sizes of the aged care facility - with anything from a 10-unit facility to a 50-bed site on the table.

A number of sites have been suggested - including at the Greek Orthodox church in the CBD, as well as in Nightcliff, Marrara, and Palmerston.