

Opening Statement Senate Estimates 15 February 2023

Tonight's Last Post Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial commemorated the 81st anniversary of the fall of Singapore.

In one of the costliest campaigns for Australia in the Second World War, 1789 Australians were killed and 1306 were wounded. In a single week of fighting on Singapore Island, more than 880 Australians were killed. It was one of the few campaigns in which the total number of dead exceeded the number of wounded. In a seven-week period, 22,000 Australians, including 71 nurses from the Australian Army Nursing Service, became prisoners of war. One third of those captured did not survive their captivity.

Tonight, we remembered them.

With regard to the Memorial's Development Project, I am very pleased to report that all enabling and early works have been completed. The three main works packages have been let; one for each of the 3 main sites: the Southern Entrance and Parade Ground; the Bean Building, Research Centre and Central Energy Plant; and Anzac Hall and the Glazed Link.

We remain on schedule for the Southern Entrance, Parade Ground and Research Centre to open next year. We have commenced planning for the Anzac Day Veterans' march to return to the parade ground next year. ANZAC Hall and the Glazed Link are on track for opening by the end of 2025.

Among the challenges of the construction site, we continue to be open to the public to commemorate and foster an understanding of Australia's experience of conflict. In January alone, we welcomed 47,765 visitors to the galleries and 7,608 visitors to the daily Last Post Ceremonies. We have so far remained a "travellers' choice"; a 5 star reviewed venue on TripAdvisor and intend to do so throughout the Development, maintaining the dignity we are known for and our veterans deserve. Admission to the Memorial continues to be via free, timed ticketing to allow us to manage visitors within our building capacity.

Maximising access to the National Collection remains our guiding principle, but we must do so safely.

We currently have three touring exhibitions at locations around Australia; taking the collection to people in cities and regional centres across the country. Action! Film and War is currently open at the Museum of Tropical Queensland, Ink in the Lines is open at Geraldton Regional Art Gallery and Art in Conflict will open in Townsville on 3 March.

The galleries inside the new buildings will also start to be realised. We have recently been able to give the public the first taste of what to expect, revealing the CH-47D Chinook A15-202. This aircraft served four rotations in Afghanistan before being damaged in a Special Forces operation. We have spoken to over 100 Afghanistan veterans during the development of this display. Chinooks are also used in humanitarian operations, so we know that this aircraft will speak to many different groups.

The first volume of the Official Histories series was completed and published in December. We look forward to our planned "In Conversation" event including book signing with the Official Historian, Professor Craig Stockings on Wednesday 15 March.

I also had the honour of inducting The Honourable Kim Beazley as our new Chair – the Memorial's 29th – last week and introducing him to staff and walking him through the Development. We are looking forward to working with him.