

Submission to Inquiry into Australian War Memorial Development Project

27 May 2020

To whom it may concern,

It is fitting that the service of people during wars be commemorated. However, a disproportionate amount is already spent in Australia on this, especially when compared with most other countries. Far less is spent on the pursuit of peace and the recognition of people who have worked nonviolently for peace, social justice and environmental sustainability. To give but one example, the suffragette movement fundamentally changed society for the better, yet has few—if any—museums, memorials, statues, parks or bridges named for it or its leaders, despite the hardships, including jail and excoriation, which many of them endured. It is time to direct some funds towards such memorials, such as a Peace and Nonviolence Museum, and less on unnecessary and extravagant extensions to war memorialisation. Such a museum (there are many examples around the world, such as in Hiroshima, Japan) would have the effect of encouraging and inspiring future generations to aspire to peaceful resolution of problems and nonviolent social change, and to understand how such change can occur without resort to violence.

Alternatively, the public resources and money that would be used for the proposed War Memorial expansion could be far better spent on social housing, or women and children fleeing domestic violence.

The timing of this inquiry is unexpected and unusual. An inquiry for heritage approval—a matter for the heritage section of the Dept of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE)—has not yet concluded. This means that the PWC must report on whether a major national cultural project should go ahead without the benefit of important heritage information. This lacks due process and is totally unacceptable.

Strong public opposition to this proposal has been ignored by the AWM, and transparency has been woeful. The AWM still refuses to release its report on the “consultations” that were held several months ago. On 4 March, Wayne Hitches, Executive Program Director of the AWM redevelopment project, told Senate Estimates that 4 out of 5 Australians *support* the redevelopment. No evidence for this claim has been made public, despite MAPW requests. On 29 June last year, a *Canberra Times* poll revealed that 4 out of 5 respondents *opposed* the redevelopment.

The AWM’s claim that the expansion will help provide a “therapeutic milieu” for veterans suffering PTSD seems unsupported by medical evidence.

The proposed redevelopment, while giving pride of place to objects in the form of weaponry, would continue the AWM’s refusal to recognise the Frontier Wars, the wars on

our own soil which have had a profound and lasting impact on many Australians and on the national psyche and culture. The AWM's credibility has been further damaged by allowing multinational arms dealers to sponsor the museum, thereby discrediting any pretensions of it being a place for objective contemplation of war and its causes. Arms dealers profit from war and desire to glorify their products and profession rather than examine critically the need and impact of them.

I conclude by reiterating that the public resources proposed to be poured into this project would be far better spent on recognising the achievements of nonviolent lobbyists, advocates and activists, such as through a National Peace and Nonviolence Museum, or on urgent health, domestic violence, education and environmental programmes.

Sincerely,



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