



9 June 2020

Dr John McVeigh, Chair
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Dr McVeigh

Australian War Memorial Development Project

I am forwarding this submission to the Public Works Committee for their consideration of the Australian War Memorial Development Project. As background, I am writing as a Canberra-based librarian and historical researcher. I retired from the public sector in 2003 after seventeen years managing the J V Barry Library at the Australian Institute of Criminology.

1. The stated purpose of the proposed work and its suitability for that purpose

According to the ‘frequently asked questions’ document on the War Memorial’s website, ‘the Memorial currently does not have the gallery space to properly tell the stories of the Australian experience of recent conflicts ...’.

The purpose of my submission to Parliament’s Standing Committee on Public Works is to challenge this assertion and argue that any development work for the Memorial can be undertaken in a far more cost effective way. Also, I understand that work on the project will stretch out over nine years, diminishing the remembrance, education and tourist impact of the Australian War Memorial during that time. It is the scale of the project over an extended period that is most worrying. I would argue that the remembrance function is the most important aspect of the Memorial’s mission and I am troubled that for nearly a decade, families of the many thousands of Australians killed in war will have a diminished capacity to commemorate their loved ones or learn about the conflicts in which they served.

2. The need for the work

I accept that major cultural institutes, such as museums, art galleries or libraries, do require upgrading or modernisation from time to time, but the destructive nature of the Memorial Development Project flies in the face of any notion of ‘upgrading’ and ‘modernisation’ because it involves the removal of the modern award-winning Anzac Hall, introduced to exhibit some of the AWM’s most significant large object using sound and light in innovative ways, and, in the words of the War Memorial’s website ‘tell[ing] compelling stories of Australia’s servicemen and women’.

3. The cost-effectiveness of the proposal

Expansion or modernisation of the Australian War Memorial can be achieved in a much more cost-effective way, particularly by constructing annexes to the main building. For instance, over the years the AWM’s Research Centre has provided valuable information services to a range of clients with access to library and archival resources. A separate research annex, proximate to the main building, would not inconvenience members of the public utilising the annex who would still have ready access to the main museum collections. The cost of

building a modern research annex would only be a fraction of the cost of re-developing the main Memorial building.

4. The amount of revenue it will produce if the work is revenue producing; the current and prospective value of the work

For many years the Australian War Memorial has been a popular tourist destination in Canberra. While generating increased revenue through tourism or other sources should not be a prime objective of the Memorial, there is no doubting that the destructive impact of an extended development project would impact on the attractiveness of the War Memorial as a tourist destination.

To conclude; I would urge the Public Works Committee to reject the War Memorial Development Project and recommend to Parliament that the Memorial's Executive re-think its development strategy.

Sincerely
John Myrtle

Contact details:

