



27 May 2020

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission Re: Australian War Memorial Development Project

The History Council of Western Australia is concerned about the proposed \$498 million extensions to the Australian War Memorial (AWM).

The need for the work

We contend that the proposed work is unacceptable and unnecessary for the following reasons:

1. *The proposed extensions herald a change of direction for the AWM's roles, although this has not been sanctioned by amended legislation.* As set down in the *War Memorial Act 1980*, the AWM fulfils the roles of a memorial to Australia's war dead, a research centre and a museum. It has a mandate to amass photographic, documentary, film, art and heraldic collections, material culture items and ephemera related to Australia's military history for research and exhibitions relevant to Australia's military history. The *Act* defines military history as "wars and warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service, including the events leading up to, and the aftermath of, such wars and warlike operations".
2. The AWM's *Referral* states that its role is "leading remembrance and understanding of Australia's wartime experience", which is substantially different from the role set out in the *Act*. This indicates that the Memorial's current Director and Council are seeking to change the emphasis from exhibitions and research (where members of the public may make their own interpretation) to manufacturing an "experience" which may or may not be authentic.

The cost-effectiveness of the proposal

We disagree that the proposal is cost-effective because:

1. The Australian War Memorial, purportedly, seeks funds to extend its exhibition space, yet the extensions include a planned new entrance as an "experience" for visitors.

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2. The extended exhibition space will display recent, large military hardware including items not necessarily chosen for their historic connection with Australians on active service. One such example is an F1-11 plane (said to occupy “pride of place” in the new exhibition space), which never saw combat with the RAAF, and was plagued with problems resulting in the deaths of 10 airmen. We do not see how these exhibits will increase Australians’ understanding of the wars in which our nation has taken part.
3. We support the contention by the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, that the AWM focusses little attention on war’s wider impacts on society, and by concentrating on displaying military hardware “enforces the simplistic notion that Australians’ experience of war starts and finishes with battles, using high tech equipment, rather than vulnerable human beings”. Additionally, there is a continued failure to adequately address the Frontier Wars. These failings result in a biased and ahistorical representation of Australians’ war experience.

The current and prospective value of the work

We believe that, instead of making the AWM a more attractive museum for visitors, the proposed work may actually be detrimental to the Memorial’s reputation and physically damaging to the existing building.

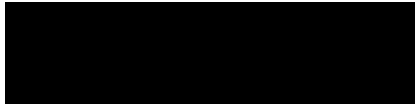
1. The AWM prides itself as being Australia’s foremost national museum and a keeper of the flame for the nation’s war dead. Yet these plans have earned it such epithets as “Disneyland”, “a theme park” and “a vanity project” from a wide range of media and individuals, including former Directors and staff. We are concerned that there has been considerable criticism, too, of the lack of public consultation. The AWM belongs to all Australians and everyone should be given adequate time to participate in any consultation process.
2. There is a serious possibility that the proposed extensions will physically damage one of Australia’s most iconic heritage buildings. The proposed new Southern Entrance will significantly alter the appearance of the front of the original building by removing the forecourt, stairs and plinths. These alterations will also impact upon the view to Parliament House, which is one of Canberra’s design features, conceived by the city’s architect, Walter Burley Griffin.
3. Anzac Hall, which was constructed only 20 years ago and which won the Sir Zelman Cowen award for architecture, is to be demolished. The proposed glazed courtyard linking the current Memorial building with a new Anzac Hall will not be unobtrusive, as claimed but, as with the Southern Entrance, will significantly change the building’s appearance.

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4. We concur with the Australian Institute of Architects' concerns that the project has progressed without relevant heritage approvals; that there has been inadequate assessment of the impact of the site, and that over development will result in a loss of the qualities that make the AWM nationally significant.

Yours sincerely,



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