



Submission No. 31

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Inquiry in the Administration of the *National Memorials Ordinance 1928*

The Canberra & District Historical Society submits that since the *National Memorials Ordinance* was gazetted on 31 August 1928, there have been considerable changes in Australian society. For this reason, the CDHS welcomes this Inquiry into the Ordinance as timely and an opportunity for the operations of the Canberra National Memorials Committee (CNMC) to become more consistent with other related activities, such as planning and heritage. For this reason, the CDHS recommends the following, with our arguments for these presented in more detail, later in this submission:

- Changes in the membership of the Canberra National Memorials Committee (CNMC) that includes relevant federal and community groups from heritage, history and planning bodies, as well as community representatives
- Changes in CNMC processes that include fixed, regular meetings and processes similar to other bodies, that includes agreed themes, priorities and criteria for the selection of memorials, and includes a recognition that commemoration and memorialisation does not have to include built structures
- Processes that include beyond adding expertise to the CNMC, that enable independent advice by having an advisory bodies
- A change in community 'consultation' to community participation that acknowledges the collaborative approach now espoused in planning and heritage best practice

The CDHS considers this Inquiry timely if not overdue, and that changes are needed to the administration of the Ordinance, recognising these other approaches to the central space of Canberra. This is borne out by the frequent community concern about, if not outrage at, CNMC memorial decisions, such as currently about the proposed WWI and WWII Memorials, or the earlier proposed 'Fan' for International Women's Suffrage, or the sense by many of our members that the Parliamentary Triangle is being 'cluttered'.

Often such concern is not about the subject matter, but the design, location, and / or lack of participation in the decision-making.

It is also timely to acknowledge that many changes have taken place in Canberra as the national capital since the Ordinance of 83 years ago. These include a population nearing 400,000, yet with a very high proportion of those migrating from other parts of Australia. This does not suggest that consultation with the Canberra community is sufficient to represent Australia, but it acknowledges that Canberrans form a local community with a strong pride in the city as the national capital but also comprehend broader Australians' perceptions of Canberra as well as national themes of importance. They also have strong attachments to the spaces and places where memorials are currently inserted. An early and central role in their involvement is appropriate.

Since 1928 also, Canberra has seen the Griffin Plan implemented, grown and cherished. There has been a widening recognition of Canberra's importance as a planned city. Now, internationally recognised as potential world heritage value, not only by planners, but also by heritage bodies, this is also nationally and locally acknowledged the heritage listings covering the Parliamentary Triangle of Canberra—the centre of Griffin's design, and other spaces within the ACT's 'Designated Areas'. The CDHS considers that the current process of singly consideration memorial proposals and their construction is having an incremental negative impact on these heritage spaces and landscapes. For this reason forward strategic planning that may include a shift to other forms of commemoration is recommended as outlined below.

Administration of the Canberra National Memorials Committee

Membership of the CNMC

Presently, the Ordinance provides for eight members, that includes 'two other members ... from amongst persons who are recognized as authorities on Australian history' (Ordinance 1928 s3(2)). The current membership is seven, with no appointed historians.

The CDHS considers that while the consistent inclusion of expertise such as historians is to be adopted in the future, that there is considerable merit in including those with heritage and planning experience, not 'merely' historians. These are areas of expertise that have developed considerably since 1928. They provide a relevant capacity about what history may be commemorated, and how and where, yet respect the considerable historic, aesthetic and community values of the area today. In the case of community values, a community representative is needed on the CNMC. But, 'community heritage value' (social value) can only be protected by including relevant communities themselves, not someone speaking for them (see processes below).

There are many such experts in Australia, in the case of heritage, the Australian Heritage Council has such expertise, but key professional and community peak bodies such as the Australian Council of National Trusts, Australia ICOMOS and the Federation of Historical Societies are another. These latter three have recently formed the National Heritage Partnership (3 August 2011).

Process for decision-making by CNMC

Records show that the CNMC does not have a consistent meeting timetable. It is suggested that just as any similar national committee, that the CNMC set administrative processes in place, to meet xx times a year, with time for relevant community and expert input prior to the meetings.

The CNMC then needs to establish a future agenda and structure to identify key national areas for commemoration. It is not clear whether the CNMC has undertaken such a scoping. A strategic plan and list of priority themes can avoid the incremental impact of approvals one-by-one, without an overall vision. The current impression the CDHS has is that the CNMC is reactive rather than proactive in taking up proposals for memorials in an ad hoc basis rather than having an overall vision of what work has been done. One tool that might provide guidance is the former Australian Heritage Commission's *Australian Historic Themes Framework 2001* (www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/publications/commission/books/australian-historic-themes.html).

For it seems as noted, that current decisions are ad hoc and without a future vision. For example, it is not clear why each Australian of the Year has a standing memorial by the lake, when a website, such as for those Australians awarded an Australian Honour, would not equally celebrate such Australians' contributions. Instead the current practice is making more, and more, barriers to individuals' sense of place and peace by Lake Burley Griffin. Similarly, it is not clear why every war fought needs separate memorials along Anzac Parade, when the charter for the Australian War Memorial, originally for WWI, then extending its charter to recognise WWII, when built in 1941, and other wars since, rather than perhaps groups that contributed, such as peacekeepers, the homefront etc.

The current *Guidelines for Commemorative Works in the National Capital* (NCA 202), provide no guidance on key elements in Australia's story to commemorate, beyond military commemoration, and the very general statement that 'the celebration of people, events or ideas that have meaning and value for the community at large'. The CDHS is unaware of any 'conversation' with the community at large about what has meaning to them that might be celebrated. If such a recognition of key historic themes, events and individuals are adopted, then there can be a sensible process of decisions about what form such celebration is appropriate, rather than assume it must have physical form.

For inherent in the Guidelines is also the assumption that memorials must be physical 'works', yet the Ordinance makes no mention of such, stating that it 'provides for the location and character of National Memorials, and the nomenclature of divisions of, and public places in, the Canberra City District'. The Guidelines acknowledge the many ways to commemorate and celebrate the people, events and ideas that area important, noting that from 'stamps and coins, the placement of interpretive signs and plaques, the naming of holidays and festivals, the dedication of streets, leisure facilities, gardens, parks,

buildings and the construction of memorials' (NCA 2002:2.1). The CDHS without wishing to be too semantic, suggests that the term 'memorial' is incorporated in many of these less tangible commemorations, and that the CNMC might take a broader view of its role and not assume that built structures are needed to the degree currently assumed.

Any process revision needs to take into account the current heritage— aesthetic, historic, scientific and social (community association) values. The decision and design processes need to bear the heritage values into account from the outset; it is insufficient to wait until formal referral processes. The *Burra Charter*, adopted as the best practice cultural heritage guidelines by all levels of government in Australia, needs to be applied. This, along with a transparent memorials strategy with key themes and priorities outlined for the future, will go a long way to obviate conflict with community and interest groups who feel they are involved far too late in the process, if at all.

Mechanisms for the CNMC to seek independent, expert advice

As noted above, having relevant expertise on the CNMC is one main mechanism to ensure independent and expert advice.

The CDHS advises that 'community consultation' in planning decisions is frequently regarded by communities associated and connected with a place where change is proposed, frequently see current 'public comment on media release' as tokenistic. This is a value recognised as part of heritage, and therefore needs the early inclusion of those communities rather than the formulaic 'public comment' process currently applied—sometimes.

It is also suggested that a consultation process with key expert groups is undertaken early in decisions about any new physical memorials in terms of how they meet the broader framework of key themes, as well as the type of commemoration is appropriate, and where it might be placed. Those organisations approached as well as planning and heritage bodies, should be groups with a connection with the historic theme or event being celebrated.

Opportunities for improving transparency

Do we want to say anything?

Appropriate level of parliamentary oversight

Appropriate level of public participation

See comments above recommending:

- Representative of community on CNMC
- Early participation of community in the development of key themes, events and people eligible for commemoration and what type of 'memorial' appropriate, particularly non-physical structures
- Process of early input to development of any particular memorial based on the framework already developed as suggested above

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President