

Submission on National Memorial Ordinance

By Air Marshal David Evans AC DSO AFC RAAF (Ret.)

I was appointed chairman of the National Capital Authority in January 1997 and remained in that position until June 2004. My first task was to instil a positive attitude and a prompt response to community request and applications. There were structural and organisational problems with the self government Act that needed to be reviewed but given that the NCA, Territory Governments interface had been in place for only eight years, the planned organisation was reasonably efficient.

One of the problems the Authority had to rationalise was the matter of memorials proposed for construction in the central area of the National Capital. This was generally referred to as the parliamentary triangle but it extended to ANZAC Parade and other areas. This matter emerged when someone proposed a statue to Mahatma Gandhi. Although the proponent did not proceed with the proposal, it did raise the question of where the various types of memorials should be located. A Peace Park had been built on the southern side of Lake Burley Griffin, adjacent to the National Library. Clearly this ad hoc type of decision was unsatisfactory and should not continue. It was then the Authority had an extensive study carried out by Dr. David Headon to develop a set of protocols identifying the various categories of memorials and recommending appropriate locations in the Central Area.

Those protocols are still in place – with only very minor amendments. Legally they are only guidelines. This of course is unsatisfactory. The idea that the Authority might ignore them was simply not anticipated. In retrospect, once accepted by the Authority the protocols should have been put to the Canberra National Memorials Committee for ratification and then included in the National Capital Plan. This should now be put in place.

It is stressed that the current protocols give consideration to other activities that are part of community use of the Central Area. For instance Rond Terrace is designated as an area for public gathering and entertainment. It currently caters for up to 100 events each year. In August 2005 I Chaired the committee staging the celebration of VP Day – the end of World War 11. The veterans were given pride of place in Rond Terrace. The whole area on both sides of the lake – Rond Terrace and Commonwealth Place – formed a perfect amphitheatre and crowds estimated at 200,000 viewed and enjoyed the celebration over two days. Placing two large Memorials to war and sacrifice would create the sombre atmosphere that would simply destroy the Rond Terrace as a place for the community to enjoy a variety of entertainment.

A factor that deserves serious consideration when assessing the merits for or against the two memorials, is the attitude of ex service associations. It is pertinent that not one of those bodies support the proposal. The Alliance of Defence Services Associations, the Naval

Association and the Air Force Association openly oppose the proposition. The RSL, as a matter of policy, does not oppose any memorial. However, the RSL would give no financial support to this new venture. This lack of support by the ex-service associations would, I believe, be sufficient grounds for withdrawing the application. However, the proponents are clearly not inclined to do so. Taking account of the more important factor, the planned development of our National Capital, I would submit the view that the JSCNCET should recommend the proposal be rejected.

In support of that suggestion I would ask the Committee to read the brief points I made to a public meeting on 23 March 2011. {Attachment A}. Also please note Attachments B and C, letters I sent to the Chairman of the Australian War Memorial and the National President of the RSL and their replies.

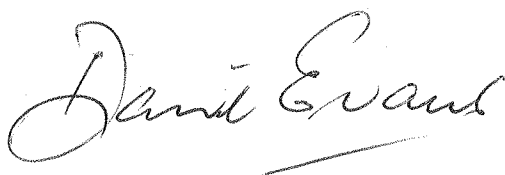
This project has been allowed to proceed to the present stage without the breadth of consultation the public has a right to expect. In my view the National Capital Authority has erred seriously in ignoring the protocols set down after a thorough in- depth study. I can see no legitimate reason for it having done so.

The Canberra National Memorials Committee. I would not like to see the top level downgraded. The charter is to oversee Memorials in the National Capital on behalf of all Australians. It is worthy of having the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition as Chairman and Deputy Chairman. There would be merit in having a member from the Canberra community who would be familiar with the ethos of the National Capital. A representative from another state would avoid the charge of parochialism. A member of the NCA and the Minister responsible for the Australian Capital Territory should be permanent members.

The symbolism of Memorials should not be so obscure as to be imperceptible to the viewer.

The protocols should be legally binding.

Given the late stage of your hearing I have sought to be as brief as possible. Nevertheless if you read the short attachments I include, my submission covers in full the reasons for my opposition to what I regard as a well intentioned but bizarre proposal.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Evans". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom of the page.