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Office of the Clerk Assistant (Committees)  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 620 Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

22 August 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Inquiry into the administration of the National Memorials Ordinance 1928**

Attached from page 2 onwards is a submission to the above inquiry. A summary of the points of my submission is set out below. I make this submission with a background of expertise in the history of the idea of a national capital and its planning set out in my book *Canberra: City in the Landscape*; programs advisor to the Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts in the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, The ANU; expert panel advisor to the National Trust of Australia ACT; public commentator on Canberra; and Chair of the ACT Place Names Committee 1999-2009.

- Lack of transparency in the workings of the CNMC.
- Lack of transparency of who attends meetings of the CNMC.
- Lack of transparency or clear mechanism for the CNMC in seeking expert advice.
- Unsatisfactory and undemocratic way in which membership of the CNMC has developed.
- Inappropriate and inadequate arrangements for public participation.
- Instituting a transparent sequence of events from proposal for national memorials or place naming through consideration to decision making is imperative. The current process is palpably unsatisfactory as demonstrated by the World War Memorials controversy.

Yours faithfully

Emeritus Professor Ken Taylor AM

## **Inquiry into the administration of the National Memorials Ordinance 1928**

The current working of the Canberra National Memorials Committee (CNMC), who attends meetings when they are called, and how independent expert advice is sought - or recommended to be sought - collectively appears to be an opaque process. It is a process that seemingly does not meet the spirit of the inception of the Ordinance of 1928 and the high hopes in, and pride for, Australia's national capital and its symbolic meanings. The public perception, therefore, is that consideration of proposals is done behind closed doors, lacks transparency, and any public consultative effort from interested and informed parties is missing.

At the time of adoption of the 1928 Ordinance there was clearly a desire to try to get Australians more interested in their national capital. A good example of this was the Presentation Avenue scheme where many from around the country came to Canberra to plant trees in that Avenue.

Following ACT self-government an ACT Place Names Committee with government members was set in place in 1989. However from November 1998 it was decided that membership should be drawn from committee members 'who are highly respected in their field' to advise the minister. ACT government members were to attend meetings to advise the committee. I had the privilege of chairing the committee 1999-2009. From time to time an officer of the NCA attended meetings to advise on and discuss matters likely to affect national concerns or to advise on national memorial/place naming matters. But the point of my comment here is that the ACT foresaw the wisdom of appointing experts in the field to advise the minister on place naming and commemorative issues. It begs the question of why such a *modus operandi* is lacking for the national aspects of places and memorials in the nation's capital.

It appears that any mechanism for seeking independent expert advice is, or has been, to put it politely, obscurely handled. It appears, particularly from the current example of the proposed World War Memorials (WWMs) at Rond Terraces, that the method of delivery of advice (such as it has been) behind closed doors and lack of evidence of appropriate expert advice has been most unsatisfactory. We may assume from the commentary by Mr Gary Rake (current CEO of the NCA) that in the case of the WWMs then officers of the NCA delivered in principle approval to the proponents of the WWMs without any public discussion or proper inquiry into the effects of the proposed structures on the setting of the land axis and the meaning of the existing War Memorial. Further, if the chair of the NCA committee and members were aware of the lack of public scrutiny, this gravely compounds the matter.

In matters affecting decisions on national memorials, their siting, naming of national places the process ought to be entirely clear and open. It should not and must not be delegated by members of government or public service designates to an unknown group of deputed people which seems to have been the case over the last few years. There has been no appropriate level of public participation, nor is it clear how and where any unfettered expert advice has been sought or given.

The above points which I make are underscored by the wholly unsatisfactory way in which the proposed WWMs have been handled. In this regard I attach from *The Canberra Times* two critical public opinion comments that I have made and two letters (Attachments 1-4).

It may be assumed that one of the recommendations from the Inquiry will be that the NCA be directed to consult more widely. In this regard it must be noted that Mr Gary Rake, over the past two years, has made abundantly clear his intention to do this. He should be unambiguously supported in this.

The current opaque *modus operandi* of the CNMC must be scrutinised, who attends meetings and who is deputed to attend, and the need for expert opinion to be made openly available, not available behind closed doors. This calls into question the current membership of the committee and how it might be broadened.

The Canberra National Memorials committee has a responsibility, not just to approve or disapprove a proposal put to it by a proponent but also to let all Australians know that it has before it a commemorative proposal for their national capital so that it can gauge the level of support for that proposal. The CNMC should see such a proposal as a means by which to get Australians more interested in what is going on in their national capital. Above all what should be borne in mind is that we are dealing with national assets of the country's national capital, a place of deep symbolism that belongs to all Australians, not just a small faceless group meeting behind closed doors.

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## Proposed war monoliths destroy visual integrity

The new memorial plans are anything but a positive contribution, **KEN TAYLOR** writes

The great land axis, so compelling an aspect of Walter Burley Griffin's legacy in the Canberra Plan, is one of the city's enduring visual jewels. Few could not be other than inspired by the majestic prospect with its predominant symmetry crossing the lake – the great water axis – to Mt Ainslie. It is an inspired view where the symbolic formal landscape is in compelling dynamic tension with the bush-clad image of Mt Ainslie. It surely ranks in its historic context, meaning and composition as one of the finest views across a city and internationally one of the world's memorable landscape axes on a par with Versailles or Washington, DC.

Much of its attraction comes from the way that Canberra from the outset was envisaged as a city in the landscape and of the landscape. In tune with this, the Griffin design admirably suited the natural amphitheatre qualities of the site where, as Robert Freestone muses, "the setting [was used] as a theatrical whole" to give a design that "was rich in symbolism". The device of radiating avenues with the hills as focal points and dramatic views out of the city to the striking hill landscape surrounds orchestrated the theatrical quality of the design. Major and minor axes created impressive vistas with the major land axis and water axis set at a right angle to each other in the centre of the stage articulating the whole pattern.

Changes to Griffin's plans saw his Prospect Parkway, which terminated at a public meeting place – the casino – replaced by Anzac Parade and the Australian War Memorial. This building and the national significance of Anzac Parade, overlaid with the Anzac legend and Australian history and nationhood, have added another layer of meaning to Griffin's axis. This was a pattern and morphology that was central to the National

Capital Development Commission's planning and urban design ideas for the symbolic heart of the nation. It followed William Holford's review of the Canberra Plan in 1958 in which he proposed that the land axis needed to be more visually effective.

The revised Griffin Plan of 1918 and its successors have been predicated on a clean sweep of landscape space along the lake on the line of the land axis underpinning its visual and physical effectiveness. This device lends emphasis to the vista along the axis to Mt Ainslie. It focuses the eye cleanly on the dignified elevation of the War Memorial, where the incline along Anzac Parade has the effect of foreshortening the view and appears to bring the memorial closer. The portal buildings at each end of Anzac Parade from the commission era further complement the visual integrity and dignified symmetry of the whole setting. Such a planning and spatially complete urban design ensemble is sufficient for me to argue against the proposed siting of the two 20m-high World War memorials at Rond Terraces. One of the purposes of the memorials is supposed to be that they are "of sufficient size and stature to contribute positively to the character and significance of the north/south axis [Walter Burley Griffin's land axis]". This is one of those phrases that is virtually meaningless; nothing other than words, words, words. The proposed 20m-high monoliths are anything but a positive contribution to the land axis. From the illustrations available, they effectively lessen the visual integrity of the War Memorial building.

By imposing their monumental scale and bulk on the foreground of the view of the memorial north along the axis, they compete with the memorial: their effect consequently is to make it

seemingly recede. Perhaps the people who wrote the brief for the design competition should have taken wider urban-design advice. A further factor to consider is that of the symmetry of the monoliths. In outline they offer a symmetry, but each has a different elevation facing the lake which is in contest with the dignified symmetry of the composition of Anzac Parade and the War Memorial.

Whether separate memorials to the two World Wars are necessary is open to question. If such a scheme is to proceed, why is the site at Rond Terrace? It is effectively outside the setting of Anzac Parade that is the location of other memorials. Should we contemplate moving out of the precinct dedicated on each side of the parade? I think not. Why also is the discrete model of the memorials set along the parade not followed? One may ask for whom are the memorials conceived? Why are they necessary? This newspaper reports that, if the project is to progress with a heritage-impact study, there are more hurdles to clear. This begs the question of why such a study was not done before the monumental designs appeared?

I have usually been wary of offering examples of other cities as a model for Canberra. This is because we have suffered from time to time over the years from people being flown in to tell us how to do things, often without an understanding of the context of the city in which they are guests. Nevertheless, on this occasion, I would suggest that if there are to be two memorials, the model of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington is one to contemplate. It is a reflective place, discrete, quiet and engenders silent thought. Further, it respects its setting on the Mall near the Lincoln Memorial.

■ Ken Taylor is an emeritus professor with the Research School of Humanities and Arts at the ANU.

*The Canberra Times*

28 June 2011

That the planning heritage of the city – this pre-eminent city in the landscape – not just isolated bits and separate buildings, is not already given protection under commonwealth law such as through National Heritage listing is something that I find myself consistently having to try to explain to international colleagues at meetings and symposia. Many of these professionals hold our city in high regard given its outstanding stature as one of the world's few planned cities.

Some cities have already gone beyond national recognition to embrace international recognition through the world heritage process. Nevertheless, the announcement by NCA Chief Executive Gary Rake (*The Canberra Times*, June 23) that he is working on a case to have Canberra protected is to be warmly welcomed. I say this having submitted a private nomination for part of the city in 2009 for National Heritage listing consideration.

But to return to the memorials: the revelation by Gary Rake of the process – or lack of it – that the former NCA administration applied to in-principal support for memorials in advance of any design or planning details is tantamount to a mockery of good planning.

Overlying this is the lack of public consultation – that figured highly in submissions to the inquiry a few years ago that Senator Kate Lundy chaired. It is reassuring to see that Gary Rake is intent on addressing this positively.

Finally, and perhaps on a contentious note, on the issue of the potentially palpable negative visual impact that the memorials pose, I well recall a description of ill-sited developments in the landscape by the eminent English landscape planner, (Dame) Sylvia Crowe (Sylvia Crowe prepared, incidentally, the first ideas plan for Commonwealth Park working with local colleagues). She once referred to visually disruptive and inappropriate elements in the landscape as a display of visual illiteracy.

■ Professor Ken Taylor is with the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University.

## Memorials would be a blot on the landscape

KEN TAYLOR

**I**n public debate on the proposed controversial war memorials planned for the shore of Lake Burley Griffin prominently astride the land axis, considerable attention has been focused on the visual effect they will have.

In particular the negative impact of the sheer size of the monoliths looking north along Anzac Parade and the consequent impact on the perspective view of the War Memorial building and its setting have been noted. Indeed *The Canberra Times* featured an opinion piece by me on February 3 this year where I argued that, should the memorials proceed, they would effectively destroy the visual integrity of the War Memorial and its setting.

Visual integrity is not merely a matter of what is seen, but how we see with the eye and interpret it with our minds. Through this process we understand the places that we know and cherish, that are part of our collective identity and memory, have meaning and significance. They hold for us intangible values that speak to us, give a sense of identity and place. This is the stuff of heritage significance.

How management decisions are made to look after places depend on expressions of significance to the community. It underpins and is a cogent reason why an emergency nomination for the lake to be added to the National Heritage List has been promulgated.

Travelling south down Anzac Parade recently and looking along the great land axis to the magnificent landscape setting of inner and outer hills framing old and new parliament houses, it occurred to me that equally this view would be irrevocably compromised by the memorials. It is a view that has been likened to an exquisite stage setting. The beautiful dynamic tension between the design intent of the axis and its setting for the buildings representing our parliamentary democracy seen against the bush clad hills is compelling.

We have in this city one of the world's great landscape axes equal to or surpassing the Mall in Washington, the central axis of the 17th central gardens at Versailles, or the central Janpath axis in New Delhi. To protect the integrity and authenticity of this primary element in the plan of the city should be a paramount concern.

### Attachment 3

Mike Buick's reference to the Griffin Plan to support his case for the two war memorials ("What is the appropriate way to mark world wars?", February 17, p19) entirely misses the point from a planning perspective.

Opposition on planning grounds is not anchored solely or predominantly in something that "is in conflict with the WBG [Walter Burley Griffin] Plan". Certainly Griffin's great land axis survives, but has been successively changed in character.

Commemorating the armed forces by renaming Griffin's Prospect Park Anzac Parade, culminating in the War Memorial, was the first change.

Given that Griffin was a pacifist, would he have demurred on that part of his axis that he envisaged as a place of the people becoming a memorial avenue to war?

The National Capital Development Authority continued the memorial focus with a clearly defined zone from the War Memorial along Anzac Parade to Constitution Avenue.

South of that, including Rond Terraces, was and remains for public open space, following the Griffin idea of democratic open space along the lake.

From this point alone, the siting is misplaced.

It is exacerbated by the negative impact on the physical and visual integrity of the War Memorial posed by the memorial. One wonders how their design can conceivably be seen to be in response to detailed guidance by the

NCA in full recognition of the Walter Burley Griffin Plan as Buick claims.

The words "edifice complex" spring to mind. Canberra is not merely a memorial to Griffin. It is, like any other city, a series of layers over time, each contributing to its sense of place and character, each layer building on its predecessors.

Such a context is doubly significant in the symbolic central area of a planned national capital like Canberra.

Just because this is breaking down in many parts of the city and the character changing with ever-increasing pace – until, we are instructed, we will look like any other city – does not mean it should prevail in the national areas.

Prof Ken Taylor, Research School of Humanities and Art, ANU

*The Canberra Times* 23 February 2011

Attachment 4

