

Executive Summary

This report concerns recent work to repair roads and carparks on the Gallipoli Peninsula in western Turkey at the site of the historic Allied campaign in 1915. It is alleged that in late February 2005, Turkish authorities' widening of parts of the coastal road at ANZAC Cove and the construction of two car parks uncovered fragments of human bone and damaged the military heritage of the site. This report is concerned specifically with allegations that the then Australian Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Danna Vale, had requested these roadworks in August 2004 and was therefore complicit in the damage wrought. The inquiry was established following public allegations regarding the government's complacency in allowing the construction to proceed without a proper heritage evaluation of the site.

Chapter 1 of this report examines the significance of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The 1915 conflict on the Peninsula was part of an Allied plan for Australian and New Zealand troops to distract the Turkish army from British troops landing further down the Peninsula. It was hoped that the British would then face little resistance in their push to capture the Dardanelles, and then Istanbul, assuming naval success. The nine-month conflict on the peninsula cost the lives of 87 000 Turkish, 22 000 British, 10 000 French, 8700 Australian and 2700 New Zealand soldiers, among others. An estimated 450 000 people were killed or wounded.

The Allied campaign at Gallipoli is one of the pillars of Australia's military history and is widely regarded as a defining moment in the formation of the Australian nation. It was reported first-hand by the revered military historian, Charles Bean; popularised in Peter Weir's 1981 film, *Gallipoli*; authoritatively documented in Les Carlyon's 2001 book of the same name; and recently depicted in Dr Peter Stanley's book, *Quinn's Post*. In recent years the Allied campaign at Gallipoli has experienced a resurgence of interest as a symbol of Australian independence, nationhood, national ethos and identity. There has been strong growth in attendances for ANZAC Day ceremonies at ANZAC Cove over the last decade. The level of visitation is expected to increase in the years leading to the centenary commemorations.

The Turkish people also view the Canakkale naval and Gallipoli land battles as founding national events, albeit for different reasons. The conflict was Turkey's sole victory in five First World War campaigns and is seen as the last great victory of the Ottoman Empire. More particularly, it flagged the military capability and ambition of Mustafa Kemal, and the beginning of his role in Turkey's transition to a secular republic.

Chapter 2 reviews the evidence that roadworks were needed on the Peninsula. Clearly, the ANZAC Cove sector of Gallipoli is experiencing significantly increased levels of tourism from Turkish, Australian and New Zealand citizens. The number of visitors attending the 25 April ceremony at ANZAC Cove has increased from roughly 10,000 people in 2002 and 2003, to an estimated 18,000 in 2004 and 17,000 in 2005. Hundreds of coaches used the roads on and around ANZAC Day.

The evidence received by the Committee was unanimous: the roads around Gallipoli Peninsula were in need of repair. Apart from the increased volume of traffic, the roads were also crumbling from erosion, poor construction and lack of past repair work. Some held concerns that a serious accident may occur along the coastal road. Many witnesses noted that access by road for commemorations at the ANZAC site has been difficult with insufficient parking spaces for coaches coming in from the north. There are also inadequate facilities for those attending commemorative activities at the ANZAC Commemorative Site adjacent to ANZAC Cove, including poor water supply and toilet facilities.

The Turkish Government, in recognition of its responsibilities and the need to provide better access on the peninsula for visitors of all nationalities, has embarked on a major program of investment in road upgrades. Under the 1923 *Treaty of Lausanne*, it is the responsibility of the Turkish Government to ensure the upkeep of the roads to the many Allied and Turkish memorials on the Peninsula. The Australian Government, through the agency of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG), and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), has been active in seeking improvements to all facilities at the Australian commemorative site, including improved road access and parking. In August 2004, a request was made in a letter from the then Australian Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Danna Vale, to the Turkish Minister for Environment and Forests, His Excellency Mr Osman Pepe. The letter suggested improved turnaround facilities for coaches at two northern locations on the coastal road. It also recommended an upgrade of the inland road from Lone Pine up to Chunuk Bair, and down along the third ridge to the Kemalyeri Memorial.

The roadworks undertaken by Turkish contractors from late February to mid-April 2005 were restricted to the coastal road. The repairs included: the construction of carparks at North Beach and on the seaward side of the road adjacent to Shrapnel Valley; the extension of the road on the northern headland of Ari Burnu; the removal of a short section of road on the seaward end of ANZAC Gully; raising and deepening the southern headland of Hell's Spit; and a 15 metre excavation on Brighton Beach to the south of ANZAC Cove. Along the southern parts of the coastal road, the cliff has been sheared off to enable new bitumen to be laid. Spoil from the shearing was dumped onto the beach and into the sea below.

Chapter 3 examines the two main concerns with the recent construction work on the coastal road on the Peninsula. The first is that the roadworks have uncovered bone fragments of soldiers killed without burial in the 1915 conflict. The second claim is that the roadworks have caused permanent damage to the military heritage of the landscape. The Committee finds both these claims to be true.

There is no evidence to doubt the claim made on 12 March 2005 in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Herald Sun* by Australian historian and journalist Mr William Sellars that he had found 'what appear to be leg and hip bones' at the road construction site. The newspaper articles noted that the photographs refuted statements by the Australian and Turkish Governments that no human remains have been dug up at

Gallipoli. Mr Sellars explained to the Committee that on 1 March 2005, Fairfax journalist Russell Skelton, Turkish tourism operator Ilhami Gezici and his wife Bernina, and 'a number of other people' were all present when the bones were found. The Committee heard Mr Sellars confirm that Turkish employees of the company carrying out the roadworks had removed the bone fragment.

On the question of damage to the military heritage of the landscape, the Committee finds that significant sites of the ANZAC campaign between April and December 1915 have been lost forever. The coastal road has been widened beyond the extent necessary to ensure visitors' safety; spoil has been deliberately dumped onto the beach below; there were no environmental measures put in place to minimise erosion from the construction; and no effort was made to preserve the footsteps of the original ANZACs. Australian authorities failed to identify and record sites of military heritage, despite representations to do so prior to the work.

The Committee finds that Australian authorities and the Australian government were complacent in their response to allegations and evidence that this damage was occurring. The Director of the Office of Australian War Graves, Air Vice Marshal Gary Beck, told the Committee he did not think the proposed widening of the coastal road would have any impact on the environment. For this reason, the Department of Veterans' Affairs did not instruct the Australian Embassy in Ankara to raise any objections. Air Vice Marshal Beck told the Committee of his surprise in late February 2005 that parts of the road along Brighton Beach had 'quite literally' been widened about one metre either side. Although AVM Beck briefed Minister Kelly on 8 March 2005 on the full extent of the roadworks, the Prime Minister stated on 11 March that 'I'm satisfied by the advice, that it [the roadworks] is being done properly'. The Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Mr Mark Sullivan, stressed that 'there was no engagement with us in respect of the roadworks prior to the press becoming interested'.

Similarly, there was no effort made to investigate allegations that bone fragments had been uncovered. The Department of Veterans' Affairs accepted the advice of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that: 'our representatives have carried out an extensive examination of the area and have found no evidence that human remains have been disturbed'.

The Committee finds this inaction particularly damning given the letter from Minister Vale. The Australian Government placed too much faith in the assurances of Turkish officials and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that no damage was occurring. By its failure to safeguard the ANZAC Cove site and its Australian military heritage, it defaulted on its responsibility to the Australian people, particularly the expectations of veterans.

The fourth and final chapter of this report summarises the evidence and previews future initiatives between Turkish and Australian authorities to develop and preserve the ANZAC sector. Further roadwork upgrades are planned for ANZAC Cove. Mr Sullivan told the Committee that there was a 'fairly compelling argument' that the coastal road will require some form of shore protection. The Australian Prime

Minister was briefed on the possibility of a rock wall, and subsequently wrote to his counterpart in Turkey to seek discussions on the subject. In response, the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr Erdogan, has invited Australian officials to suggest their preferred forms of shore protection. There is also the Turkish Government's priority of upgrading the inland road from Chunuk Bair to Lone Pine. Both the Australian and Turkish Governments acknowledge that close by this road are areas of extreme military heritage sensitivity. Mr Sellars commented in his submission that this work would disturb many more human remains than were unearthed by the roadworks at ANZAC Cove.

In a supplementary submission to the Committee, Mr Sellars also expressed strong concern at recent proposals to develop a number of scenic viewing areas for visitors at high points on the battlefields of the Gallipoli Peninsula. These areas would be accompanied by carparks. In particular, Mr Sellars argued that any construction at Chunuk Bair, Hill Q, the Nek or near the Sphinx would be carried out over terrain that was fought over by the Allies. Historians and experts advising the Gallipoli Historical National Park have advised against these proposals. However, there is no obligation for the National Parks Authority to heed this advice. The Australian Government has not yet been officially informed of these proposals.

The Committee is concerned that the Australian Government takes action to avert a repeat of the damage done by the 2005 construction on the coastal road. It welcomes the recent creation of an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) and acknowledges and supports the cooperation of the Turkish and Australian Prime Ministers to undertake an archaeological survey of the Gallipoli site. The IDC is chaired by the department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and has representatives from DVA, the Department of the Environment and Heritage and DFAT. The lead role is taken by DVA, which will provide suggestions to the Turkish Government on the completion of roadworks at ANZAC Cove and lead on the broader historical and archaeological review of the area.

The Committee is surprised at the lack of preliminary research prior to the 2005 roadworks given the risks involved, the significance of the site, and the knowledge of DVA, OAWG and DFAT officials that construction was planned. It recommends a full military-historical audit of the entire battlefield area at Gallipoli, with Australian priority for the ANZAC area. In addition, the Committee recommends that a working group be established by the government to advise it on the coordination of the conservation management planning of the Gallipoli site. This group should include key government departments (including DVA, DEH and OAWG), the Returned Services League, the Australian War Memorial, and historians and archaeologists with specialist knowledge of Gallipoli. The activities of this working group should be documented in annual reports.

The Committee also recommends to the parliament that it establish a joint standing military commemorations committee. This Commemorations Committee will exercise bi-partisan oversight over all commemorative programs, including the management of all sites of Australian military heritage. It is hoped that the establishment of the Committee will remove the risk of political exploitation of commemorative events by

the government of the day. There should also be special arrangements whereby discussions and negotiations with the Government of Turkey with respect to the international recognition of Gallipoli should be reported to the new parliamentary standing committee on a quarterly basis.

Senator Michael Forshaw

Chair

