



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Secretary

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Mr Alistair Sands
Secretary
Australian Senate Finance and
Public Administration References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sands

In response to your letter dated 13 May 2005, and my response of 26 May 2005, I enclose herewith a submission by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Australian Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee Inquiry into matters relating to the Gallipoli Peninsula.

As indicated in my letter of 26 May 2005, Departmental representatives will be available to attend the public hearing for this inquiry, if required, on Friday 17 June.

Yours sincerely

Michael L'Estrange

**Submission by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
to the
Australian Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee
Inquiry into matters relating to the Gallipoli Peninsula**

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade submits the following comment on the Terms of Reference of the Committee in its inquiry into matters relating to the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Department would like to note at the outset that Gallipoli Peninsula lies within the sovereignty of the Government of Turkey. On numerous occasions the Australian Government has expressed its appreciation for the role of Turkish authorities in maintaining the Anzac sites and in enabling organisation of an annual commemoration of Anzac Day on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Most recently, the Prime Minister in a media release of 26 April following a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan in Istanbul, "expressed deep appreciation for Turkey's stewardship of the Anzac area and the warm welcome extended to the many thousands of Australian visitors there each year".

(a) The circumstances surrounding the request by the Australian Government to the Turkish Government in August 2004 to undertake work to ease congestion on the Gallipoli Peninsula

Officials at the Embassy in Ankara, working with Department of Veterans Affairs officials, have held ongoing discussions with Turkish officials from 2000 on traffic flows, congestion, access and safety issues in the preparatory period leading to each Anzac Day commemoration.

These concerns have heightened with increasing numbers of visitors attending the Anzac Day commemorations each year, from several hundred in the 1980s to around 10,000 on Anzac Day 2000 and an estimated 16,500 in 2005, most of them Australian but including many New Zealanders and some Turkish nationals.

Access and safety concerns have also been shared by the Turkish Government, as numbers of Turkish visitors to the Gallipoli sites have grown. It is estimated that over 2 million people visit the Gallipoli peninsula each year, most of them Turkish nationals. About 800 coaches with Turkish tourists visit the peninsula each weekend.

A letter of 2 August 2004 from the then Minister of Veterans Affairs, Ms Danna Vale to the Turkish Minister for the Environment and Forests, put on the public record by the Prime Minister on 23 April 2005, addressed improvements to the Dawn Service site and possible works on an entirely different road on the peninsula, not work on the ANZAC Cove Road.

(b) The role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer, in the road works and related construction activity, at Anzac Cove in the lead-up to Anzac Day on 25 April 2005

Significant roadworks began in February 2005 at Anzac Cove. As indicated by the Prime Minister in his statement of 23 April, while it was common ground between

Australia and Turkey that some reinforcement and improvement of the ANZAC Cove Road was needed, works of the scale that actually took place were not sought by the Australian Government.

On 8 March 2005, Mr Downer told Parliament that our Ambassador to Turkey had raised with the Turkish government concerns about the extent of roadwork at Anzac Cove, including questions relating to disturbance of remains of fallen soldiers and dumping of soil at the Cove. Turkish officials provided assurances that no remains had been unearthed during the roadworks and that, if this did occur, work would be stopped.

On 10 March 2005, Mr Downer met the Turkish Ambassador. Mr Downer emphasised the importance Australians attached to Anzac Cove and preservation of the site, and raised reports of dumping of soil into the Cove. The Ambassador indicated that the historical significance of Anzac Cove and other sites would be protected, and soil removed.

On 14 March 2005, Mr Downer reported to the House of Representatives that Ambassador Dunn had visited the Anzac sites and found no evidence of disturbance of human remains. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which operates in the Gallipoli area, advised our Ambassador that it had inspected the area thoroughly before and during the roadworks and found no evidence of remains having been disturbed.

On these occasions (8,10 and 14 March) Mr Downer noted that it was important that the road be safe for visitors, and re-stated the Australian Government's interest in ensuring that the historic significance of the site be properly preserved.

A copy of statements made by Mr Downer to Parliament is at Attachment A.

(c) The heritage protection of Anzac Cove, including the proposed joint historical and archaeological survey of Anzac Cove and proposals for the establishment of an international peace park, as well as national and world heritage listing for the area

The Turkish Government protects the site, known as the Gallipoli Peace Park, under two domestic laws, the Gallipoli Peninsula Historical National Park Law and the Law for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has joined the Department of Environment and Heritage in raising with Turkish officials on various occasions, matters relating to the heritage status of the Anzac site.

When Prime Minister Howard met Prime Minister Erdogan in Istanbul on 26 April 2006 he announced agreement that "Australia would continue to consult closely with Turkey over our desire, fully consistent with Turkish sovereignty over the area, to symbolically recognise the historical importance of the Anzac area". This process will be informed by a joint historical survey of the Anzac area (including archaeological aspects) to provide a clear basis for balancing development plans for the park with the preservation of key sites. The Department of Veterans Affairs is the

lead agency for the survey, in consultation with a number of government agencies including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

June 2005

Mr CAUSLEY (2.11 p.m.)—My question is directed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the Minister for Foreign Affairs inform the House of actions taken by the government to address concerns about roadworks being undertaken at Anzac Cove?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the honourable member for his question. I think all members of the House now know that this year is the 90th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings and that there is going to be a particular focus on the Anzac Day ceremonies at Gallipoli. There have been some media reports—I think in the *Daily Telegraph* and possibly on one of the commercial stations—about the rebuilding of an existing road around Anzac Cove. This road is being rebuilt for safety reasons. There is no question that the road does require some urgent reinforcing, and the Turkish authorities are endeavouring to complete the road in time for the 90th anniversary commemorations.

On seeing the media reports I instructed our Ambassador to Turkey, Jean Dunn, to raise with the Turkish government the issues that had been raised in the media reports because, obviously for all of us, the site is of enormous historical and emotional importance and it would be of very great concern to us if the remains of fallen soldiers were being disturbed and dirt was being dumped onto the beach at Anzac Cove. During the course of the discussions yesterday, the Turkish authorities told our ambassador that archaeological work had been carried out prior to the roadworks commencing and that no remains have been

unearthed during the roadworks. They also assured us that if any remains were unearthed they would immediately instruct that the reconstruction of the road be stopped. We appreciate that very much. I must say I very much appreciate the sensitivity with which the Turkish authorities responded to our representations. It is true that the contractors have put some earth onto the beach at Anzac Cove. The Turkish government is instructing the contractors to remove that earth from the beach so the beach can be restored to its proper condition.

In conclusion, I think all members of the House would appreciate the job that the Turkish authorities have done in protecting Anzac Cove and the surrounding national park and the enormous efforts they make to make the Anzac Day ceremonies there a success. I know tens of thousands—probably hundreds of thousands—of Australians have benefited from the work that the Turks have done. Very recently we had the Governor of Canakkale here. Some members will have met him; I did. Canakkale is the province within which Gallipoli resides. I took the opportunity in my meeting with him to thank him very warmly for all that the Turkish authorities are doing. From the ambassador's discussions with the Turkish authorities I am satisfied that they are very aware of our concerns, they are aware of the media reports and they will take all necessary steps—as they have done for many, many years—to protect the dignity of the site.

Anzac Cove

Mr TICEHURST (2.24 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister update the House on developments in relation to the ongoing road works at Anzac Cove?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the member for Dobell for his question and for his interest. I know many veterans—and, indeed, the rest of the community—will be interested in this issue. There have been reports, which were referred to a couple of days ago, in the media about the Gallipoli peninsula, in particular Anzac Cove, and there being problems there. Let me just make a couple of things pretty clear in answer to the honourable member's question. I met with the Turkish ambassador just before question time today. We had a discussion about the proposal to improve the road system around Anzac Cove. The member for Hughes, in her capacity as the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in August last year wrote to the Turkish authorities and explained that she thought there was a need for improvement in some of the road systems, for safety reasons. The Turkish authorities, quite rightly, are endeavouring to improve those roads. There has been significant erosion over the years, and the road above Anzac Cove, in particular, requires urgent reinforcing. The ambassador, yet again, has reassured me that the historical significance of Anzac Cove and other sites will be protected while these essential roadworks are undertaken. He has confirmed the advice that I provided to the House a couple of days ago that no remains have been uncovered during the roadworks and that soil which has been placed on Anzac Cove beach would be removed shortly. We are grateful for that.

Can I also say that we appreciate very much the work that the Turkish authorities do to preserve the Gallipoli peninsula. We all know how much it means to us as Australians, and the Turkish government and the Turkish people are very sensitive to that. There is no suggestion that the Turkish government is going to somehow politicise the Gallipoli peninsula. There is no suggestion the Turkish government is going to turn it into some symbol of Turkish triumphalism, militarism

and nationalism, as has been suggested in newspapers. I think it is very important that people be reassured that the Turkish government is working very closely with us to ensure that Anzac Cove and the Gallipoli peninsula are properly preserved and remain an enormously important commemorative memorial to our people as well as to the Turkish people, and that it will continue to look after the peninsula with appropriate dignity.

Anzac Cove

Mr BALDWIN (2.20 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister update the House on the developments in relation to Anzac Cove roadworks following the ambassador's visit over the weekend?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the honourable member for his question and for the interest he has in this. Of course, there has been a lot of media reporting about the roadworks that are taking place on the Gallipoli Peninsula and around Anzac Cove. Let me make it clear to the House that about two million visitors a year go to the Gallipoli Peninsula, of whom 50,000 or so are Australians. So I think the House would understand that there is in particular an enormous amount of Turkish interest in the Gallipoli Peninsula. I asked our ambassador based in Ankara, Jean Dunn, to visit the Gallipoli Peninsula and Anzac Cove area over the weekend so she could inspect the roadworks herself. She has done so over two days. During those inspections she found no evidence of any human remains or bone fragments. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which operate in the Gallipoli area, advised her that they inspected the area thoroughly before and during the roadworks and found no evidence of remains. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission also advised that they thought it very unlikely that any human remains would be found, because they area was thoroughly searched for remains in the 1920s and any remains found then were interred in local cemeteries.

A man called Bill Sellars, who is an Australian who lives in the area and has an intense interest in the preservation of Gallipoli, has told our ambassador that of two bone fragments that he had photographed one had disappeared and he could not relocate the other. The ambassador has asked him to advise us and of course the Commonwealth War Graves Commission if he does find any further remains, in particular so those remains can be treated respectfully and in the appropriate way. The ambassador did register yet again with the Turkish authorities our concern that, if

remains were to be found, the roadworks should stop, and the Turkish authorities have agreed to do precisely that.

Can I just conclude by saying again what I said last week. The roadworks are essential for safety reasons, given the enormous number of people who are going there. Erosion over the years has rendered the road above Anzac Cove dangerous and in need of urgent repair. Obviously, we would hope that those repairs would be done as sensitively as possible, and we are making that point to the Turks. Maybe some sort of rehabilitation work will have to be done in time if there is scarring as a result of the road. These issues all have to be worked through.

It is very important that all of us register our gratefulness for the cooperation of the Turkish authorities in ensuring that the historic significance of the site is properly preserved. The Turks are very committed to that. The House should make no mistake: Gallipoli is enormously important to us, but remember that it is important to the Turks as well. It was an important event in the history of modern Turkey, not least with the coming forth of Kemal Ataturk, who was the leader of modern Turkey, as a very successful military leader. The government will continue to approach this issue responsibly, cautiously and with sensitivity—we understand only too well the sensitivities of the issue for all of us as Australians—to make sure that we transmit the right points to the Turkish government and not just make political points.