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Background to the Anzac Centenary and the submission from the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) called for public submissions to “gather views about how Australia should commemorate and recognise the Anzac Centenary”. (Submissions closed 16 September 2010) A website has been set up at www.anzacentenary.gov.au/publications.htm

How is the Centenary defined?

[From the call for submissions] “From 2014 to 2018, Australia will commemorate 100 years since our involvement in the First World War and also a century of service in war, defence and peacekeeping. In planning for this commemorative interval the Australian Government wants to hear your views of how we can acknowledge and commemorate a century of service and sacrifice by the men and women who have served Australia and its allies in war, defence and peacekeeping; and also explore the legacy of the First World War for Australians and what this means for the future.”

A National Commission has been appointed “to review the ideas put forward, and make recommendations to the Government on options to mark the centenary”.

The members of the National Commission are:

- Warren Brown, editorial cartoonist and journalist
- Rear Admiral Ken Doolan AO RAN (Retd), National President of the RSL
- the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser PC, AC, CH, former Prime Minister
- the Honourable Bob Hawke AC, former Prime Minister
- Major Matina Jewell (Retd), former ADF serving member and peacekeeper
- Kylie Russell, veterans’ advocate and nurse. [Widow of the first Australian soldier killed in Afghanistan]

MAPW’s submission questions the myths which are given as fact on the Centenary website, and the lack of reference to Australian opposition to our participation in the 1915 war in Turkey. We welcome the invitation to examine war as a human failure; and we make a number of concrete suggestions regarding commemorative activities which focus on the human costs of war, and how to prevent wars in future.



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Anzac Centenary

SUBMISSION FROM THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION FOR PREVENTION OF WAR (Australia)

Summary of proposed activity:

MAPW seeks to foster a better understanding of the damage and waste caused by warfare and regards the ANZAC Commemorative projects as an appropriate opportunity to enhance our understanding of the origins of wars, their real effects on participants, their families and civil society. We emphasise the importance of prevention, peace-making and peace-keeping. We believe this would be the most responsible and genuine tribute we can pay to the ANZACs and those who have followed in their footsteps.

Relation of our submission to the proposed themes

The activities outlined meet the following proposed themes:

- i) **Commemorative services:** commemorative events which recognise the many violent deaths that occurred in the dispossession of the indigenous peoples of Australia, and a commitment to solely defence-orientated military policy,
- ii) **Infrastructure and capital works:** the construction of a significant national site in Canberra dedicated to the cause of peace and
- iii) **Education, public awareness and community access:** Multiple educational projects aimed at fostering better understanding of the origins of war, its destructive consequences and the possibilities for reducing its impacts by prevention, peace-making and peace-keeping.

Submission:

Introduction

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) is an organisation of doctors and other health professionals working to prevent war by addressing its causes and consequences. MAPW works for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and the prevention of armed conflict. We promote peace through research, advocacy, peace education and partnerships.

As recommended by the ANZAC Centenary Commemoration website, our submission includes “ideas and principles” as well as recommendations for “specific commemorative projects”.

PRINCIPLES

PREVENTION - War kills and maims: we must stop it.

MAPW recognises that substantial resources and attention will be devoted during the ANZAC Centenary Commemoration to the bravery and ‘sacrifice’ of Australian service men and women. However, we strongly recommend that the *major* focus of attention be on the enormous waste of human (and other) resources at Gallipoli, in World War I and in all wars. As physicians, nurses, surgeons, medical scientists, psychiatrists and other health specialists, we have particular expertise in the mortality and morbidity caused directly by human conflict - as well as the indirect costs associated with the diversion of resources to militarism worldwide.

The most responsible and genuine way to ‘honour’ our veterans – to “*best commemorate and recognise the Anzac Centenary*” - would be to do all we can to ensure that war’s appalling consequences are avoided in the future. The ANZAC Centenary Commemoration can facilitate this through a variety of projects designed to enhance our understanding of war – its origins, its costs and its prevention.

RECOGNITION - treating the first casualty: truth

There are many myths of militarism. Unless they are questioned and contested they will continue to lead us into ill-conceived conflicts, as well as burdening us with unresolved and damaging tensions. The primal myth of Australian militarism is alluded to in the introductory remarks on the ANZAC Centenary Commemoration website:

“...blood had stained the land during the establishment of the colonies ...”

But this welcome acknowledgement that the dispossession of Australia’s indigenous peoples was violent is hastily overtaken by the assertion that:

“The Gallipoli campaign was the first time Australians had gone into battle in a major conflict as a nation”

Obviously the details about the invasion and occupation of this continent are contested, but there is good evidence that tens of thousands of Aboriginal people died defending their countries. The blood of up to 3,000 Europeans also ‘stained the land’ [Frontier - Reynolds, Allen & Unwin, 1987]. Many Australians would argue that their forbears went into battle in major conflicts to defend their ‘nations’ long before the invasion of Turkey.

It is hard to see Australians truly coming to grips with our past military engagements whilst we maintain this national blindness to the unfinished trauma and dislocation of war in our own land.

Some other commonly-held myths include:

- The myth that Australia’s participation in World War 1 was a matter of universal agreement and pride among Australians.
- The myth that we were defending ourselves against attack, rather than acting offensively to gain control over Turkey’s waterways for strategic purposes in support of the most powerful empire of the day

- The myth that all the men who died there did so voluntarily and gladly for us, and that those who lost their husbands, sons and brothers believed it was worth it
- The myth that all the young Australians at ANZAC Cove had most noble motives and a full understanding of why the war was being fought. Young men choose to fight for many reasons. For many, the reason was a genuine desire for peace. For others, it was an adventure, or a trip to England, or a desire to prove themselves as men,

PEACE-MAKING – listening, learning, acting

“... we also remember that war ultimately represents a human failure. When we reflect on the Anzac Centenary we should explore these tensions and complexities” (ANZAC Centenary Commemoration website)

This is an important insight and one that deserves substantial attention as part of our commemorations. The wars of the ANZAC century have killed over 160 million people – including over 100,000 Australians - maiming many more and leaving a trail of devastation both human and environmental. But it is also a century during which civil society drove nation states to negotiate previously unimaginable agreements on disarmament, co-operation and international institutions. These tremendous developments are captured in the Constitutional preamble of the UNESCO: *‘Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed’*.

In the 21st Century, in a world stocked with over 22,000 nuclear weapons, the importance of success in this arena is more critical than ever. Perhaps the survival of civilisation depends upon it.

The Commemorative activities during 2014-18 offer an opportunity for Australians to reflect on the catastrophic failure of societies and their leaders to find non-violent ways of managing and resolving conflicts. There is a large and growing knowledge-base about making and keeping peace, including the role of health-workers, educators and technicians, as well as diplomats and soldiers. [see *‘Vision 2030 - An Alternative Vision for Australia’s Security’* - MAPW, 2010]

It would be an appropriate commemoration of the deaths of the 160 million if we made genuine steps towards better regional and international understanding and conflict management over the coming decade, in the hope of avoiding further wastage of life.

MATURATION – self-reflection

Averting conflict means maintaining the capacity for empathy. It means not demonising ‘the other’. It means respecting the attributes and practices of other peoples. Language and rhetoric nurture attitudes. National discourse reflects political ideologies. This is another area where it would serve us well to *“explore ... tensions and complexities”*. If we are to ‘honour’ the ANZACs by avoiding the repetition of senseless slaughter, by making and keeping the peace, it would surely help if we consider and challenge the growing fashion for rhetorical assertions such as:

1. Coming of age: Australia became a nation amidst the mud and blood of Gallipoli. To those who had remained at home, to some of the bereaved, and to some returned servicemen, this idea may have provided comfort, while for others it may have increased their suffering – some veterans and their families found such sentiments a painful mockery of their experiences. Since the questioning of the 1960’s, ANZAC Day has experienced a revival both as a day of remembrance and reflection on young lives lost, and as an occasion for national pride. This has

been one aspect of a more general increase in expressions of nationalism in Australia, meeting some popular needs perhaps, but also encouraged by some politicians as a means to gain favour with the electorate and by the corporate world as a marketing strategy.

How authentic are the expressions of sorrow and respect for the young men who died? Do we acknowledge the fear, anger, horror, and sense of betrayal many felt, as described by Gallipoli veterans, and continue to be described by servicemen returning from current conflicts? Whose voices are being selected to be heard?

And how authentic is the 'blooding' view of the ANZAC campaign: as a declaration of a distinct Australia to be proud of? Do we also remember that our servicemen were pawns of the British High Command at the time, serving Britain's imperial ambitions, and that Britain went on to command our troops and to treat us, as a nation, with similar contempt in the Second World War, not even informing our government where our troops were to be deployed, nor when and why it suited Britain to surrender Singapore to the Japanese? Furthermore, Australia's participation in the wars in Iraq and Vietnam are but two examples where Australian soldiers have been put at risk and lost their lives in the interests of 'great and powerful friends'.

The 'coming of age' notion appears to be more hyperbole than reasoned argument, and perhaps intended to reinforce the importance of contemporary unpopular wars in defining our place in the world. In military matters at least, far from maturing as a nation, we have developed little capacity for self-examination, learning the lessons of the past and avoiding war's horrors. Australian leaders have encouraged our young men and women to participate in wars that are futile, unjust or illegal or all of these, wars that have not been publicly debated or have not received bipartisan support.

Are the young men and women involved therefore serving their country and the greater good, or are their lives being used for the political and/or financial gain of others?

One must ask therefore whether we have truly honoured those who have died on our behalf. Would those who died at Gallipoli approve of our military adventures in the past 60 years, or would they feel betrayed at the frequency with which we do it all again? Would Australia once again send men to a war 'to end all wars'?

2. *"... great personal qualities shine through the Anzac spirit..."*, and *"... courage, fortitude and mateship: human qualities that help to define the Australian character..."*
(<http://www.anzacentenary.gov.au/commemorating.htm>) The "ANZAC spirit" is often referred to in the context of describing Australians' finest characteristics. In fact the ANZAC spirit seems almost to have acquired a mythical super-human quality that defines us as a nation. But are these not simply *human* qualities? To propose bravery, resilience, a sense of shared experience, mutual respect and unconditional assistance (<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/mateship/>) as peculiarly Australian characteristics is increasingly orthodox – but is it valid? What does it mean that Australian women now profess 'mateship'? Is our brand of comradeship so different than that of the Swiss or Chinese, the English or the Inuit? Or does this form of national exceptionalism nurture a sense of otherness, breeding precisely the kind of cultural perspective which leads to antagonism rather than compassion?
3. '*sacrifice*' is an appropriate term for the death of a soldier. There are three common definitions of the word (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sacrifice>)

- a. The act of offering something to a deity in homage, especially ritual slaughter
- b. Forfeiture of something highly valued for the sake of one considered to have a greater value.
- c. Relinquishment of something at less than its presumed value.

Most users would prefer the second option presumably , but the connotations of ritual slaughter – five and half thousand young Australians massacred mindlessly by machines in 24 hours at Fromelle - and the facility with which some commanders offered up the lives of their ‘pawns’ makes this term a worthy topic for interrogation

COMMEMORATIVE PROJECTS

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) believes that the centenary of the ANZAC landings offers an opportunity for rational debate on Australia’s military history, including of views that are uncomfortable or challenging to us as a nation. If this opportunity is not taken, we run the risk that ANZAC Day 2015 will be marked by a thinly-veiled strengthening of militarism, old-fashioned imperialism and a ‘might is right’ approach in our foreign policies - in other words, a reinforcement of the mistakes of the past.

MAPW’s proposal for commemorative activities flow from the foregoing discussion of principles and address the themes of:

1. Infrastructure and Capital Works

Between now and 2015, Australia should demonstrate a commitment to promoting peace by establishing a significant national site, in Canberra, for this purpose. It could take the form of a museum, a park, a monument, an educational centre, or elements of all these. The centre would be opened and dedicated to the cause of peace, on April 25, 2015. Particularly it would help to educate all Australians about war propaganda, racism, the different interest groups in any society and the strong control over public opinion held by the present day media and their corporate owners.

2. Education, Public Awareness and Community Access

In the coming five years, curricula in our educational institutions should promote education on

- the causes of wars, especially World War I and the progression to World War II
- the role of the weapons industries, past and current, in encouraging use of their products
- the prevention of wars, including by peace-building, peace-making and peace-keeping.

This project could include a series of debates on

- The nature of war and its justifications:
 - The inhumane and destructive outcomes of war, and the personal and national risks, are justified under some circumstances, as when we, or our allies, are under direct organised attack, or threat of attack, that cannot be countered in any other way.
 - i. But is it justified as an act of revenge for an attack we have already suffered?
 - ii. Or for attacks not organised at the national level?
 - iii. Is it justified as a means to gain territory or commodities or to eliminate competitors in trade and international influence?

- iv. Is it justified as a way of changing a regime, or trying to establish democracy in an undemocratic country?
 - v. Is it justified as a way of overturning a democracy and replacing it with a dictatorship of our choosing?
 - vi. Which wars do we want to celebrate? Not all of our wars are equally justified, and some will have perpetrated crimes against humanity eg Iraq.
- Contemporary wars
 - Wars that politicians have encouraged our young men and women to participate in, have cost thousands of lives, and vast quantities of money that could have been spent in more life-affirming ways
 - i. but what have they achieved?
 - ii. Are they actually justified on the grounds of a threat that cannot be countered in any other way?
 - iii. Or are they acts of revenge, or a means to gain power by force, or to set up puppet governments?
 - iv. Was our participation publically debated?
 - v. Was it agreed on all sides of politics?
 - vi. Did we participate because we believed in the justifications, or simply because we wanted to curry favour with our allies and were willing to participate in destroying the lives of others to do so?
 - Young men's motives for engagement:
 - Young men do sometimes go to war to carry out the inhumane and destructive acts involved and to take the associated risks to themselves and their country because they believe their country is under threat that cannot be averted in any other way, and they want to be of service.
 - i. But they also sometimes do so because they have a romantic idea that war is a great adventure and will give special meaning to their lives,
 - ii. or because they think risking their lives will impress others (and themselves) as to their manliness,
 - iii. or because they like a fight and a chance to win, like blowing things up, like inflicting pain
 - iv. or because they believe naively that wars bring democracy to others, rectify injustice, and bring about peace,
 - v. or because they trust the justifications politicians provide, and believe the spin, without thinking for themselves
 - vi. or because they believe that in any disagreement we must necessarily be in the right.
 - vii. Which kind of young men and which kind of motivation do we wish to celebrate? They are not all equally admirable.

AUDIO-VISUAL

Another component of the educational project would include film, audio and web-based collection and promulgation of materials of veterans, survivors and their relatives which explores and emphasises their

response to the carnage and destruction. Let the verbatim words about the loss, waste and carnage speak for themselves. What the conditions were really like: if children are to be encouraged to role-play in Diggers' uniforms, and play war-games, busting dams, etc, then how best can we give them a sense of the effects of mustard gas and radiation sickness, gangrene and maggot-infested wounds, of shell-shock and PTSD, and the wider civilian impacts, of rape in war, and the brutalisation of children? We must encourage the young to question the glorification, romanticisation and sanitisation of war, and the demonization of 'the other'.

SUBJECTS FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS AND ESSAY COMPETITIONS

- Fostering regional and global peacemaking
- The role and implications of weapons of mass destruction in our defence
- Why Australia invaded Turkey, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan
- The moral and legal responsibility of leaders
- The deaths of Aboriginal peoples in conflict over the past two centuries
- The generational consequences on civilians
- Enhancing mechanisms for maintaining civility and avoiding pathways to war
- The role of arms manufacturers in WW1 and modern wars
- Enhancing Australia's capacity for peace-keeping and peace-making
- Resource haemorrhage from development to militarism
- Explore artistic responses to war
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3. Commemorative Services

In Australia's 2015 ANZAC Day commemoration, features will include:

- A commitment to ensure Australia's military policies are truly defensive, rather than offensive [Vision 2030]
- An acknowledgement that Australia's involvement in some wars has been very divisive and that many Australians believe our current military policies go far beyond legitimate military defence
- A minute's silence recognising armed conflict between black and white Australians - the current blind spot in our war commemoration

Dr Bill Williams, MBBS

President, Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)

16 September 2010