



Medical
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(Australia)

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MAPW (Australia) Submission.

Referral (No. 2019/8574) by the Australian War Memorial relating to the Memorial's proposed \$498 million redevelopment.

While appreciating the opportunity to submit comment on the AWM's proposed redevelopment, the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) finds the current process of referral for consideration under the EPBC Act confusing. It is not clear what criteria are being assessed in this round of submissions, what should be held over until a possible second round of EPBC considerations which has been flagged, and specifically what aspects of the proposed redevelopment will be considered or disregarded in the current round. The available referral document did not make those judgements any easier.

This confusion has been reinforced by the "community consultations" that are currently (in early December 2019) taking place in various locations around the country. While purportedly being to give Australians an opportunity to comment on the proposed redevelopment, attendees are often being told that only EPBC matters are relevant at this stage, the proposal is going ahead, and that people will have opportunities in the future to comment on other aspects of the redevelopment.

In addition, as strongly expressed community opposition to the redevelopment thus far seems to have been ignored, and the redevelopment plans are proceeding unabated, there are well-founded concerns that the EPBC process also will not add much by way of serious community engagement regarding the proposed redevelopment. The question of what aspects of the proposed redevelopment have not yet been decided *and* will be decided on the basis of feedback received from the community, which was raised at the community consultation session held in Canberra on 28 November, has not been answered.

At the community consultation in Melbourne on 10th December the presenter clearly stated "A decision has been made that this proposal will go ahead", and separately that "If you have objections to this proposal, approach your MP". At consultations on both the 9th and 10th of

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December in Melbourne, the presenter strongly encouraged participation in just the 2nd EPBC round in 2020, swiftly glossing over any possible outcomes of the first EPBC. Individuals were also encouraged to contact their MP, again directing attendees away from genuine participation in the 1st round of the EPBC.

MAPW notes that the EPBC referral from the AWM to the Department of the Environment and Energy ran to 27 pages, with no summary available of the key issues to be addressed. There were also hundreds of pages of attachments. Any expectation that these documents might be read in full by submitters, and not act as a deterrent to engagement, is unrealistic. As an exercise in “consultation”, this has been grossly unsatisfactory.

The extremely short initial consultation period was only extended because of an administrative error, the omission of an attachment, which leads to further questioning about the process.

However, despite the fundamentally flawed consultation process and uncertainty about which questions are being addressed in this EPBC round, MAPW (Australia) provides the following comments in the hope that they will be given serious consideration.

This submission will address primarily the heritage values of the AWM and its proposed redevelopment, values which are cited often in the EPBC referral.

The AWM clearly plays a strong and important role in educating about the role of Australia’s wars in our history. Those wars are a significant part of our heritage (although, it should be emphasised, only a part of our heritage). However, there are concerns held by MAPW and many others that the AWM currently overlooks the broad context and circumstances in which our wars have occurred, matters which are all important parts of our heritage also.

The AWM extensively quotes First World War reporter Charles Bean, whose vision led to the establishment of the Memorial. But consistently omitted is Bean’s clear underpinning concept that the AWM “not be colossal in scale but rather a *gem of its kind.*” *The proposed massive expansion undermines this vision.*

The AWM claims to assist Australians to “*remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact on Australian society*”. War’s enduring impact on Australian society goes far beyond the impacts on our service-people, notwithstanding the terrible nature of the latter. However the AWM focusses very little attention on these wider impacts, which include:

- The impacts of Australia’s wars on our security, including negative impacts from our involvement in the “war on terror” since 2001.

- Economic impacts, such as those which will occur inevitably if and when a proposed huge expansion - \$200 billion worth - of our military hardware eventuates, as proposed in the 2016 Defence White Paper.
- Our national identity. Is fighting wars the most important part of our history as a nation, or does such a view diminish awareness of our fine achievements in social, political and other spheres?
- Civilian experiences of war. Many Australians have suffered wars' ravages as civilians in other places before coming here. Their experiences should not be overlooked, lest we develop militarised and glorified views that ignore the reality of modern warfare – that most of its victims are civilians.

In relation to Australian military history, this is defined in the AWM Act of 1980 as the history of:

(a) wars and warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service, including the events leading up to, and the aftermath of, such wars and warlike operations; and

(b) the Defence Force.

Our military history also appears to be presented by the AWM with a very narrow focus, with “the events leading up to...” and “the aftermath of.....wars” being given grossly inadequate attention. There are many aspects that are given, at best, very cursory attention, such as:

- The historical context of each of Australia's many wars, to help explain: How did this war begin? What might have prevented it? Which factors helped perpetuate it or stymie peace prospects?
- The divisions created in Australian society as a result of ill-judged or unpopular decisions for war. For example, the decision that Australia would join the illegal and disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been the subject of sustained criticism since that time, particularly because, as a nation, we appear to have learnt nothing. The “democratic deficit”, perceived at the time and since, is an important part of the legacy of that decision.
- There are other examples of Australia entering wars by grossly deficient decision-making processes.
- Critical questions: Why do wars persist? What have we learnt?

To deny the importance of all these questions in an institution tasked with educating on the events leading up to, and the aftermath, of our wars, is to betray the ideals for which Australians have fought. Their relevance for the purposes of this submission is that the proposed redevelopment appears to be designed to continue educating principally about stories from the battlefield – including, troublingly, contemporary as well as historical experiences, which risks a slippery slope to military propaganda.

The proposed “pride of place” that will be given to military hardware (“large technology objects”) will tend to reinforce a simplistic notion that Australians’ experience of war starts and finishes with battles, using high tech equipment rather than vulnerable humans. The wide spectrum of the role of warfare in Australians’ lives will be reduced to a narrow, militaristic view of our history. And the wealth of available information about the context of each of our wars will be, again, overlooked.

To advocate a much broader scope in the AWM’s exhibits in no way detracts from respectful commemoration of our war dead. On the contrary, failure to learn from the sacrifices made, and an apparent determination to anticipate Australian involvement in wars for the next 75 years, does an enormous disservice to our service men and women.

AWM Director Dr Nelson claims that no-one could visit the AWM and come away enthused about warfare. However he has also stated that “the government would continue to send military forces overseas”¹. By what measure does he make such a judgement, and to what extent does such a casual acceptance of warfare, and a readiness to repeat the most dreadful parts of our history, become self-fulfilling?

Dr Nelson has also made much of the role of the proposed redevelopment in “healing” veterans, particularly those suffering PTSD. This matter appears to be beyond the scope of this EPBC referral, but it is important that dubious and misleading claims of healing properties be critically examined for evidence rather than anecdote. MAPW would be pleased to submit further on this subject if requested.

Finally, any listing of matters marginalised or ignored by the AWM is not complete without drawing attention, again, to the Memorial’s ongoing failure to recognise the Frontier Wars, which have been described by historian Henry Reynolds as our most significant military conflict. A satisfactory and logical reason for this failure has not been presented. A huge redevelopment which continues to overlook conflicts that have had a profound and lasting impact on many Australians simply magnifies this deep stain on our national story, one which we have not even begun to address.

Dr Sue Wareham OAM

President, Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)

13 December, 2019

¹ *Canberra Times*, 7 April 2018