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MEDICAL ASSOCIATION FOR PREVENTION OF WAR

***SUBMISSION REGARDING THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL'S EPBC REFERRAL ON ITS REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL***

31 JULY 2020

**SUMMARY**

MAPW (Australia) strongly opposes the proposed redevelopment. We believe that the additional prominent displays of military machinery would entrench a narrow, militaristic view of Australia's history and heritage, and the redevelopment would continue the marginalisation of critically important aspects of Australia's wars.

MAPW recommends that the speech given by Governor-General Lord Gowrie VC at the opening of the AWM in 1941 be displayed prominently at the entrance to the Memorial. He said that the Memorial would be "*...not only a record of the splendid achievements of the men that fought and fell in the war...*" but also "*a reminder to future generations of the barbarity, of the utter futility of modern war*".

In addition the right to dissent is a fundamental part of our heritage, and yet it is dangerously jeopardised by the proposed inclusion in any expansion of live feed from the ADF of current operations. Such inclusion would be an extremely slippery slope to military propaganda. It should be rejected.

Finally, any proposal for a major redevelopment at our most important place of war commemoration that continues to overlook the Frontier Wars - wars on our soil that have had a profound and lasting impact on many Australians - simply magnifies this deep stain on our national story and should be rejected.

**INTRODUCTION**

MAPW welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the second phase of the EPBC approval process for the proposed project.

AFFILIATE



FOUNDER



However we note again (as in the 2019 EPBC approval process) that the AWM's documentation for this EPBC referral has not helped the process of engagement. It is over 600 pages (82 pages of submission and 528 pages of attachments) and, again, there is no summary of the key points on which feedback is being sought. The labelling of this second phase of EPBC consultation as "EPBC Preliminary Documentation" again adds to confusion as to whether there is further EPBC documentation, and opportunity for public input, to follow.

MAPW refers the AWM to our association's submission to the Public Works Committee for more detail on our serious concerns in relation to the very poor consultation process. A major impediment to trust in the process is that the public were told during the November 2019 – January 2020 sessions that "*A decision has been made that this proposal will go ahead*". The same message, presented in many different ways, times and places, remains. Therefore confusion remains as to what decisions will be decided on the basis of community feedback. What is the exact purpose of feedback now if a decision has already been made? How much feedback was never put forward, given that the proposal has largely been presented as a "done deal"?

Nevertheless MAPW offers the following comments.

### **HERITAGE VALUES OF THE AWM**

The AWM clearly plays a strong and important role in commemoration and education 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, MAPW and many others believe that the AWM currently marginalises the broad context and circumstances in which our wars have occurred, matters which are also important parts of our heritage.

The AWM claims to assist Australians to "*remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact on Australian society*", including "*the events leading up to....*" and "*the aftermath of....*" wars. However, there are many aspects of this broad context on which the AWM focuses very little attention. They include:

- The historical context of each of Australia's many wars, to help explain: How did this war begin? Who made the decision for war? What discussions were held in our parliament? Was the decision controversial? Who opposed it and why? What might have prevented it? Which factors helped perpetuate it or stymie peace prospects? Did the war unite or divide the nation?

- The impacts of Australia's wars on our security, including negative impacts from our involvement in the "war on terror" since 2001
- Economic impacts, particularly with the current huge expansion of our military hardware
- 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 directly 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.
- Critical questions such as: Why do wars persist? What have we learnt?

All these questions – the presentation of which does not require vast space - lie at the heart of our heritage as it relates to warfare, and yet the proposed redevelopment appears to be designed to continue educating principally about stories from the battlefield, especially with displays of large items of weaponry. (Although AWM Council chair Mr Stokes stated recently to the parliamentary Public Works Committee that this is not the case, and that the content of proposed new galleries has not been decided, every other indication including the AWM's promotions indicates that that is indeed what is planned.) This will tend to reinforce a simplistic notion that Australians' experience of war starts and finishes with battles or other forms of direct combat. The wide spectrum of the role of warfare in Australians' lives will be reduced to a narrow, militaristic view of our past, present and future.

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 foreseeable future, does an enormous disservice to our service men and women.

### **THE AWM OPENING SPEECH**

The AWM's "Brief history of the AWM" (on page 9 of the EPBC documentation) refers of course to its opening in 1941, but not to the message of Governor-General Lord Gowrie VC who performed the opening. He said that the Memorial would be "*...not only a record of the splendid achievements of the men that fought and fell in the war...*" but also "*a reminder to future generations of the barbarity, of the utter futility of modern war*".

He asked:

*“What can we do for those who did so much? What can we give to those who gave us all? And I know that our answer will be that we are determined that these men shall not have died in vain, and that we are prepared for any sacrifice to put an end, once and for all, to this diabolical menace to mankind and ensure the peace of the world for future generations.”*

Lord Gowrie anticipated how future visitors would respond to the galleries and the commemorative areas. He said, *“Every one of them I am firmly convinced will declare, and will declare with no uncertain voice, never again, never again.”*

Lord Gowrie’s speech stands in stark contrast to the casual acceptance of warfare in glib [remarks](#) made in 2018 by former AWM Director Dr Brendan Nelson in promoting the redevelopment. Nelson stated that, *“the government would continue to send military forces overseas”*. Such remarks give no hint of the enormity of the price paid when governments do indeed send military forces overseas, and the responsibility of the Memorial to accurately reflect this cost. The proposed redevelopment, by giving undue space to the weapons with which we fight wars – how we fight - would detract from, rather than highlight, the human costs of our wars.

MAPW recommend that Lord Gowrie’s historic but oft-forgotten speech be displayed prominently near the entrance to the AWM.

### **THE RIGHT TO DISSENT – A PART OF OUR HERITAGE**

A further concern is that Australia’s heritage of the right to dissent, one of the democratic rights for which our nation is said to fight, is at risk. With few exceptions, the AWM gives very little space to dissenting views, including voices for peace such as the huge anti-war movement before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Unfortunately the proposed redevelopment, with its planned live feed from current ADF operations, would actively undermine the right to dissent against wars that have not yet finished. It would dangerously reinforce a notion that opposition to current wars is somehow unpatriotic and indicates lack of support for our troops. It risks an extremely short slippery slope to military propaganda.

The recent attempt by the AWM to prevent even its unpaid volunteers from speaking out on the redevelopment issue is a particularly egregious example of suppression of dissenting views.

### **TELLING THE STORIES OF WORK FOR PEACE**

While MAPW strongly supports and honours the work of Australia's peacekeepers, we observe that the AWM seems incapable of seeing work for peace in anything other than a military sense. The avoidance of wars – which the Memorial states that it wishes to recognise – precedes and goes far beyond the role of peacekeepers. Australia also has a rich heritage of civilians working for peace.

Telling these stories - beginning with World War 1 - does not need vast space. The proposed grandiose redevelopment would hinder rather than help that process.

### **A KEY PART OF OUR HERITAGE STILL IGNORED**

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.