

## DIRECTOR AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL |

OPENING STATEMENT | SENATE ESTIMATES |  
3 December 2025

It is an exciting period in the history of the Australian War Memorial.

On 30 September 2025 the RF-111 A8-134 arrived at our Campbell site. This marks the final large technology object move for the AWM Development Project. It will be displayed in the soon to be opened Anzac Atrium.

The AWM Development Project has seen the largest movement of objects, big and small in the National Collection's history. The project is still forecast to be completed on time by 2028, with major works packages delivered this year including the successful opening of the new Main Entrance in February 2025 by the Prime Minister, and the Charles Bean Research Centre in June 2025 by Veterans Affairs Minister Keogh.

The new Anzac Atrium is scheduled for a soft opening to the public this month, 15 December 2025. It will provide additional space for visitors, including a café/restaurant with the ability to host events for up to 600 people and house large technology objects including the RF-111. The new Anzac Hall will open by mid-2026. Anzac Hall includes 7,000 square metres of exhibition space across two levels featuring more than 4,000 individual objects and images.

Visitors to the Memorial, who could not imagine what we were building – and why – are now seeing it expressed in built form. It is world class, and they are rightly impressed. To be able to tell the stories of service and sacrifice of current veterans in the same way, and in the same place, as we have told the stories of those who have sailed, marched or flown before them.

These objects are also a reminder of two things for the Memorial. Firstly, we tell stories through objects, from these large technology objects through to lapel pins. Each of these large objects in the Anzac Atrium will tell the stories of hundreds of service personnel. Secondly, the importance of space in our project. The atrium has been designed to host large events. It has also been designed to give our visitors a chance to pause and reflect as they move through the galleries. In contrast to the galleries, the space is airy, light and open. Particularly for the galleries on modern conflicts, this light and space was a key consideration in providing respite to visitors. We have also designed specific respite spaces into the new galleries for veterans and their families to have a quiet moment should that be required.

The Memorial's new spaces have been honoured with several architecture and design awards. And despite the ongoing work on site, we are listed in TripAdvisor's *'Travelers' Choice Best of the Best'* category for 2025, which is awarded to the top 1% of 'Things To Do Worldwide'. The excitement around the Memorial has translated into attendance growth, with attendance figures returning to pre-COVID19 pandemic numbers. There was a 23% increase in overall attendance this year compared to 2024 with a grand total of 1,144,380 (930,466 in 2024). Public interest in the Memorial has also been reflected online. In Q4 2024-25 (Apr – Jun) the AWM website received over 6 million website page views and 571, 690 social media engagements across all platforms.

There were recent media reports on the 'Les Carlyon Literary Prize'. I have provided a statement from the Australian War Memorial Council that addresses the errors in process for the 2024 Les Carlyon Literary Prize. The Memorial has also made a factual update to the text panel

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acknowledging the status of the Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG's defamation case, next to his uniform in the Hall of Valour.

We are not only for veterans and their families, although they must always be at the forefront of our thinking. But there is a reason the majority of our visitors to the Memorial have never served or know anyone living who has served. They come to understand.

As we embark on this brave new world our new spaces offer, I believe the most important thing the Memorial can do is to move carefully and with consideration. Institutions of sandstone and bronze are not built to lurch from one issue to another; of course, they cannot remain static either or they will be of declining relevance and, ultimately, become places of curiosity rather than meaning. We will not shy away from difficult content. Our Mission is "leading remembrance and understanding of Australia's wartime experience." We present facts in context, to assist our visitors to understand the causes, conduct and consequences of war.

To conclude my statement, I would like to highlight the significant commemorative activities undertaken at the Memorial this year. 35,000 people attended the ANZAC Day Dawn Service on the Parade Ground. As part of many events to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the AWM hosted the '21 Hearts: Vivian Bullwinkel and the nurses of the Vyner Brooke' live theatre performance. This work commemorates Australian World War II Nurse Vivian Bullwinkel and the murder of 21 nurses on Bangka Island following the fall of Singapore in 1942. The Memorial hosted 12 Second World War veterans on Victory in the Pacific Day for the Last Post Ceremony on 15 August 2025.

As we contemplate the close of another year, I cannot help but reflect on the many service personnel who have or who are serving far from their families and friends. Service has many faces, but it can often ask us to be far away from our loved ones at this time of the year.

The ask of a Senators and Members of Parliament is no less demanding, and so I take this opportunity to thank you all for your service to Australia and to wish each of you a Merry Christmas.

Statement on the Les Carlyon Literary Prize

[https://www.awm.gov.au/media/on-the-record/statement\\_on\\_the\\_les\\_carlyon\\_literary\\_prize](https://www.awm.gov.au/media/on-the-record/statement_on_the_les_carlyon_literary_prize)

“The Les Carlyon Literary Prize was established by the Council of the Australian War Memorial to honour the late historian, author, journalist and Council member, Les Carlyon. Since 2020, it has been awarded biennially for an author’s first book or major publication relating to Australian military or social military history.

Advertisements for the 2024 call for submissions were inconsistent and some excluded the requirement that entrants be emerging or unpublished authors. When this was brought to Council’s attention in June 2025, they unanimously restated their intention that the award remain for emerging writers and were not privy to the short-list or long-list.

The Memorial will be writing to all entrants to apologise for the delay and any inconvenience. Entries already submitted by emerging authors for their first major publication relating to Australian military history, social military history or war history will remain under consideration in any future process.

The Council is undertaking a full governance review to ensure integrity and transparency in future competitions. Once resolved, the 2026 competition will proceed, and all eligible entrants will be encouraged to participate.”