

COMMITTEE SECRETARY
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

INQUIRY INTO CANBERRA'S NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Inquiry, it is expected, will embrace not only the National Library of Australia, National Archives of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, and National Film and Sound Archive, but also the Australian War Memorial (regardless of its present location in the Veterans' Affairs portfolio) and the Australian National Maritime Museum (in Sydney for need of a seaboard).

The national institutions exist to collect and preserve the history of Australia for research, scholarship, education and the benefit of all Australians. And like other government departments and agencies they are expected to perform at the highest levels of efficiency and economy. Measures such as "efficiency dividends" apply across the board.

That said, national institutions are unlike line-departments and large agencies of government where staffs are mostly generalists and able to move readily from place to place. The staffs of the national institutions are more specialised and contain in their ranks many professionals in particular fields who may spend their entire careers in these places.

The loss of such personnel as efficiency dividends cut deeper into operations may necessitate modifying or shutting down programs and the compromising of key activities. The threat to the National Library's "Trove" is one example of the impact of continuing Government budget cuts.

All the national institutions have had to bear the weight of Efficiency Dividends for years now and there is little doubt that they have become counter-productive.

Without corrective measures -

1. The expectations set out in the Inquiry's terms of reference are unlikely to be realised without a halt to the present erosion of resources and the establishment of adequate platforms for sustainability and normal growth.

An independent expert advisory body might assist institution managements to settle on longterm financial and staff bases for the future in line with agreed objectives. Such a process would need to take into consideration anticipated changes in fields important to institutions' responsibilities and needs, including capital programs (such as long-needed exhibition space for the NMA).

2. The national institutions do not have equal prospects. The NAA, for example, is unlikely to attract the opportunities of the NGA, NLA or NMA. This should be kept in mind.

And with governments everywhere trying to reduce spending competition for corporate and private support has in recent years intensified dramatically across all cultural fields. The road ahead will be tough.

3. Fundraising is not an amateur business or a matter of calling 'contacts'. It is serious professional work demanding patience, persistence and building relationships.

Come to terms with the following -

*The national institutions have limited prospects of developing longterm independent income streams - they are hard to come by.

*Admission charges in general were thrown out years ago and front door donations yield next to nothing.

*Commercial activities at best may break even and membership and similar programs have a "feel good" factor, but don't earn money.

*Most Australians believe they pay for the institutions by way of their taxes and the rest is up to the Federal Government.

*Corporate sponsors are interested first and foremost in how their contributions enhance their reputations and brands; they are not interested in paying for bricks and mortar or picking up Government shortfalls.

There are opportunities for the national institutions, particularly through individual or collaborative sponsorships and programs, and the Australian Museum's Westpac Long Gallery is a recent successful mix of sponsor, government and donors; but its hard work.

In the end -

4. It comes down to Government willingness / preparedness to invest in the resources the national institutions need to achieve their goals.

And finally -

5. The Inquiry should set aside notions of new institutions until the existing national institutions have been able to show what is presently achievable and what is not.

THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

The Australian War Memorial opened to the public on Remembrance 1941 and is the most widely respected and popular of all the cultural institutions, **ranking among the world's great national monuments.**

Until 1984 it sat with the other national institutions in the Government's cultural portfolio, but as other institutions developed it came to be the "poor relation". In that year, responding to pressure from the RSL, the Prime Minister authorising its transfer from the cultural portfolio to that of Veterans' Affairs to ease the competition

for funds. The move was fiercely opposed by the Memorial's Director and professional staff, but in time the Memorial began to prosper.

Today the Memorial occupies a uniquely privileged position above and apart from the other national cultural institutions, but questions are increasingly being asked about its plans and direction.

The Government has spent some \$500 million for the four years of the Centenary of Anzac and a further \$100 million for the recently opened Sir John Monash Centre at Villers-Bretonneux.

Memorial Director, Dr. Brendan Nelson, is now planning a massive redevelopment of the Memorial, to cost about as much as the entire Centenary - yes, \$500 million - to exhibit large items of military technology - recent acquisitions include Chinook, Sea Hawk and Black Hawk helicopters and an F/A-18 fighter - and provide, among other things, "veterans' welfare services". The Director puts the planned spending beside the enormous Defence budget, in excess of \$33 billion a year, declaring this to be the right "**context**". (The only proper contexts or comparisons are with other national institutions.)

The entombment of the Unknown Australian Soldier, in the words of distinguished historian Professor Ken Inglis was, "a climactic event in the making of a place in the nation's capital sacred to the spirit of Anzac". National commemoration has taken on new dimensions since the return of the Unknown Soldier and the Hall of Memory is now a place of recognisable sanctity.

This huge redevelopment would turn upside down the Australian War Memorial's unique standing as the most revered memorial-museum of its kind and among the world's great national monuments. The Director states that the Anzac Parade facade would be untouched, but scant regard seems to have been given to the total integrity of this historic, multi-heritage-listed icon.

Veterans' organisations, veterans, families and respected commentators have also questioned strongly this planned expenditure,

recommending government monies would be better directed to issues of mental health and well-being of returned servicemen and women and families.

1. The management of the Australian War Memorial should not be allowed, under any circumstances, to proceed with this \$500 million redevelopment plan for the Memorial Building.

(The Memorial already offers open-day access to its purpose-built heavy technology collection at Mitchell, ACT, and the NLA and NMA also have off-campus storage facilities. If an additional facility were justified it could easily be built, off-campus, for **less than 1/10 the cost of the proposed Memorial redevelopment**. And current museum practice favours digitisation to offer access to larger technology and objects that are rarely displayed. 3D versions of prize pieces might be put on the Memorial's website with six times as many visitors as pass each year through the Memorial's doors.)

Dr. Nelson has also said the Government would continue to send military forces overseas and the Memorial has a crucial part of **“completing the loop” on an emotional and psychological level**. **“The Australian War Memorial is an extremely important part to the therapeutic milieu** for these men and women coming back to a country that has no idea what they've done and the impact it has had on them”.

2. Responsibility for the well-being of returning servicemen and women lies between Defence and Veterans' Affairs. It has nothing to do with the Australian War Memorial - a museum and national cultural institution. The Memorial has no place in this field. Its functions and responsibilities are clearly set out in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980 (as amended).

The Director goes on to say , **“it is important to tell [their] stories and tell them now. We tell them broadly and deeply and we don't wait a decade”**.

Museums are obliged to “wait a decade” or more. Dust has to settled on issues that may be controversial and until the material has been gathered to begin a balanced analysis of events; questions will otherwise be raised as to the honesty and integrity of a museum’s work.

3. Particular care needs to be exercised when dealing with current and on-going operations and engagements. Recent criticism of the Memorial on the inclusion of Navy personnel on Australian border patrols touches on this issue.

Questions have been raised for some time about funding and sponsorships from weapons manufacturers, mainly BAE Systems, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Thales, Raytheon, and the Australian Submarine Corporation. Asked about support from those engaged in selling the means to make war, Dr. Nelson replied, “We regard it as entirely appropriate that defence contractors support the Memorial in its mission”.

The Australian War Memorial’s website reads:

“The Australian War Memorial combines a shrine, a world-class museum and an extended archive. **The Memorial’s purpose is to commemorate the sacrifice of Australians who died in war.** Its mission is to assist Australians to remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact on Australian society”.

The Memorial should not be in the business of seeking or accepting funding or sponsorships from the manufacturers of weapons of war. It is at odds with all the Memorial stands for and an affront to all who served and died for the nation, those who returned with shattered lives and the damaged families left behind. **It amounts to an institutional loss of moral compass.** One respected former Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet declare, “**The AWM has lost its way**”.

4. The Memorial should be obliged to take steps to extract itself from present funding and sponsorship arrangements with military industries and not enter into any further deals.

There are no valid grounds for this national cultural institution - established to serve all Australians - to continue under the Veterans' Affairs and Defence umbrellas and its about time to level the playing field. In the UK the Imperial War Museum sits in the Culture, Media and Sport portfolio, while in Canada the Canadian War Museum is part of the Canadian Museum of History Corporation.

5. The Memorial should return to the national cultural portfolio under a new administrative arrangements order as soon as practicable.

The governing councils and boards of national institutions are customarily made up of persons of broad community interest, but with abilities to support and advance the cause of the body to which they are appointed. Throughout its long history the boards and councils of the Australian War Memorial have been dominated by service, ex-service and veteran personnel. The present Council of twelve is made up of eight military, ex-military or RSL persons and four others. And the question needs to be asked, and answered, as to whether this is an appropriate balance for the Council of Australia's most prominent national cultural institution aiming to serve the interests of all Australians in the 21st century?

6. It is time for a review of the Australian War Memorial's management structure and the on-going composition of its Council.

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