

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Joint Standing Committee
National Capital & External Territories
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INQUIRY- ADMINISTRATION OF THE NATIONAL MEMORIALS
ORDINANCE 1928

I write in response to your letter of 19 August 2011. Thank you for the invitation to comment on the subject matter. I will confine remarks to the axis, Parliament House–Australian War Memorial and, in particular, ANZAC Parade.

The Australian War Memorial acknowledges that it has no responsibility, *per se*, for the proposal, approval and realisation of memorials on the above axis. However, it represents a symbolically strong sight-line that can be read on several levels:

- On one level, and in an overall sense, it represents the primacy of Parliament in a democratic nation. I believe this is an important over-arching piece of symbolism; and
- In a specific sense, it represents a powerful reminder when democratically elected representatives of the people are considering the implications of committing young men and women of the Australian Defence Force overseas in the national interest. They are aware the Memorial stands prominently and clearly at the head of the axis, that it already records those that have served, and particularly it commemorates those who did not return, and that any decision to commit forces will be similarly recorded at that place.

It follows that any intrusion of a memorial device onto that sightline, however well intentioned, has the potential to distract from, and lessen, the symbolism. I believe I can state confidently that the Council of the Australian War Memorial would not be supportive of any proposal that would place the axis at risk.

Turning now to ANZAC Parade, many have the mistaken belief that the Australian War Memorial has overall responsibility for this precinct. It never has, so it is understood, and it is not believed persuasive arguments could be marshalled to seek such responsibility now, or in the future.

However, given the Australian War Memorial's role, the military history expertise of its staff, and its wide experience in commissioning commemorative devices in its grounds, it could be considered sensible to seek not only the Memorial's advice when proposals are being considered, but also its views. This would be considered by the Memorial as a worthwhile change in process.

The Memorial is a statutory authority, independent within its Act, and is in a position to give expert and impartial advice.

Recommendation

The Australian War Memorial would welcome being consulted and its advice sought for any device being contemplated along and beyond the ANZAC Parade axis. It is recommended that this be formalised.

S.N.Gower

Director

September 2011