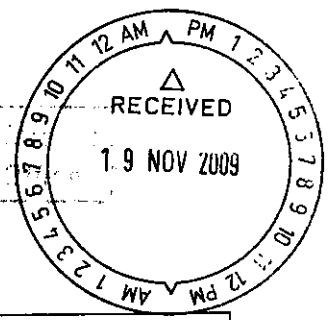


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**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

**TO THE**

**SENATE**

**FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE REPORT**

**ON**

***MATTERS RELATING TO THE GALLIPOLI PENINSULA***

This Government notes that the enquiry addressed contentious, complex and sensitive matters that attracted considerable media and community attention in 2005 and continue to be matters of importance to the Australian public and in Turkey.

The Government acknowledges the commitment of committee members in seeking to ensure that the issues were fully addressed and that all submissions and witnesses were afforded proper consideration.

Turkey has sovereign responsibility for the Gallipoli Peninsula and the historic, cultural and environmental significance of the area to Turkey from antiquity, during the First World War to the present day, and its significance to the countries involved in the Gallipoli campaign.

The Government notes and supports the measures taken by Turkey, including the Long Term Development Plan, approved by the Turkish Parliament, for the Gallipoli Peninsula Historical National Park, its declaration of the area as an International Peace Park, and the heritage listing of the Gallipoli Peninsula under Turkish law as important steps to address the longer term issues of preservation of this area.

Since the publication of the Report, there has been a range of actions that demonstrate the Australian Government's respect for and commitment to preservation of the Anzac area on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Australian Government named Anzac Cove on the inaugural List of Overseas Places of Historic Significance to Australia in August 2007, under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act administered by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The listing was accepted by the Turkish Government.

Recommendations 1 to 4 are concerned with the ongoing issues relating to roadworks, appropriate handling of human remains, and commitment to the conservation and preservation of the Anzac Battlefield area. The Government shares the Australian public's concerns over future road works in the Anzac area. In this regard, the Government continues to work with Turkish authorities towards a resolution of the Anzac Cove road and associated issues. The Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Veterans' Affairs continue to monitor and report on the road conditions and works in the Anzac area on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Government is mindful that the Gallipoli Peninsula has a long history as a battle site. This history and the number of deaths in the Gallipoli campaign of 1915 make it inevitable that there will be human remains found in the area. Responsibility for the policy and procedures for handling human remains found on the Gallipoli Peninsula resides with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and Turkish authorities. The CWGC policy and procedures are published on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website and in departmental publications, and reinforced with tour operators. The Government considers that existing procedures for reinterment and reporting of any remains found are appropriate and practical and ensure the dignity of deceased soldiers, allied and Turkish. The Government will continue to take opportunities to raise awareness of the proper handling of any remains found through its publicly available information. The Turkish authorities approach to the reinterment of remains is consistent in intent with the CWGC policy and have, during roads works undertaken last November, included an archaeologist from the National Parks in their project oversight team. This is a significant inclusion and is indicative of the shared concern over the management of this sensitive issue.

The joint historical study, including archaeological aspects, is an important measure for the preservation of the Anzac area. The purpose of the study is to provide a clear basis for balancing development plans for the Gallipoli Peninsula Historical National Park with the preservation of key sites. Regrettably, the study stalled until this Government pressed for progress. The Turkish Government advised on 16 April 2009 that the Canakkale Eighteen March University will be the lead Turkish institution. The Australian and New Zealand members of the study team met with their Turkish counterparts on 12-13 October 2009 to determine the framework and timeframe for the study. Outcomes of the meeting are being progressed by the team members with the first field phase subject to timing of permit approval processes.

The Australian representatives, advised to the Turkish Government, are Rear Admiral Simon Harrington AM RAN (Retd), Professor Antonio Sagona and Associate Professor Christopher Mackie from the Centre for Classics and Archaeology, University of Melbourne, and Dr Richard Reid, historian. New Zealand has nominated Dr Ian McGibbon, historian, as their representative for the study. This Government expects the study to be undertaken in phases and will report on progressive outcomes. The Governments of Turkey, Australia and New Zealand would need to agree on the release of any Government-appointed study.

Recommendations 5 to 7 seek to ensure issues relating to Gallipoli, and more broadly, commemorations, are dealt with transparently and in concert with Turkey and New Zealand, while Recommendations 8 and 9 specifically relate to maintaining an open and ongoing dialogue with the Turkish Government. The Government recognises that there are many diverse interest groups in Australia which have a vested and genuine interest in the preservation of Australian heritage. The Government will continue to keep these groups informed through public messages.

Working with the Turkish Government is integral to ensuring our interests are taken into account. The Australian Government presence in Turkey has been considerably strengthened by the establishment in 2005-06 of the position of Counsellor (Veterans' Affairs) in the Australian Embassy, Ankara, and the Consulate in Canakkale. The Counsellor and Consul, under the direction of the Australian Ambassador and the Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs, continue to represent Australia's interests, at the national and local levels in Turkey, in all matters relating to the Gallipoli Peninsula, including in relation to Anzac Day commemorations, works in and preservation of the Anzac area and recognition of the historical importance of the former battle sites and the remains and artefacts that they contain.

The Australian Government, through the Australian Embassy in Turkey and Department of Veterans' Affairs, maintains an ongoing dialogue with Turkish officials on issues affecting the Anzac area. It continues to work with them on plans and initiatives to preserve the area, as well as ongoing management of the Gallipoli Historical National Park while recognising that Turkey has sovereign responsibility for the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Australian Embassy has been effective in representing this Government's strong interest in the area and the commencement of the historical study. The Government, through its officials, continues to inform and liaise with New Zealand counterparts on these matters.

The Government reports to Parliament through existing arrangements and is satisfied with current Parliamentary scrutiny and reporting of the Veterans' Affairs portfolio on matters relating to the Gallipoli Peninsula. These provide for periodic and ad hoc reporting. Members and Senators have taken the opportunity to visit Turkey, particularly around Anzac Day, and New Zealand and to meet with counterparts in those countries.

Where appropriate, public statements will be made to inform the public and interested stakeholders on matters pertaining to preservation of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Government is satisfied with current Parliamentary scrutiny and reporting of the Veterans' Affairs portfolio on matters relating to commemorations. The commemoration of Australia's wartime history, including many commemorative activities, has a long established tradition of political bipartisanship.

The Australian Government has commenced planning for the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign in 2015, with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs taking the lead in this matter. In developing proposals for Australian recognition of this seminal period in our nation's history, there will be broad consultation with a range of government agencies, the ex-service and Defence communities, the education and cultural sectors and the wider community as well as the Turkish and New Zealand Governments. Measures that aim to further recognise and preserve the Anzac area will be considered as part of this process.