

War Memorial redevelopment gets heritage approval



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The [Australian War Memorial's controversial \\$500 million redevelopment](#) looks set to proceed after it secured heritage approval from the federal government despite widespread opposition to the plan.

Environment Minister Sussan Ley signed off on the 10-year project on Thursday, following assessment by department officials under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act.

Architects, former directors, historians and heritage campaigners all oppose the plan to dramatically increase the size of the historic Canberra institution, calling on Prime Minister Scott Morrison and federal MPs to rethink the project in a sustained campaign.

Debate has coincided with high-profile support for [Australian special forces accused of war crimes in Afghanistan by memorial chairman and Seven West Media boss Kerry Stokes](#).

Ms Ley said a rigorous assessment of the proposal had considered the heritage values of the memorial, opened in 1941, as well as the vista across Lake Burley Griffin to Parliament House.

“In making this decision, I acknowledge the diverse range of community and stakeholder submissions made during the consultation period and the public interest in the project,” she said in a statement.

“The Australian War Memorial holds a sacred place in the hearts of Australians and there are 29 strict conditions of approval to minimise and mitigate the residual impacts on the site’s National Heritage and Commonwealth Heritage values.”

Following the approval, the memorial will be required to prepare a heritage impact assessment of the final design.

The building's iconic shape and front facade and the main commemorative areas must be preserved.

"I am satisfied the conditions of my approval will ensure the Australian War Memorial will continue to be an outstanding national museum and memorial that recognises and commemorates an important part of Australia's history," Ms Ley said.

Memorial director Matt Anderson has argued extra space is needed to better document Australia's recent overseas conflicts, including Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mr Anderson said the redevelopment would improve visitor experience and maintain the memorial's status as one of the nation's most important sites.

"We welcome Environment Minister Sussan Ley's approval of the Australian War Memorial's development proposal under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999," Mr Anderson said.

"This is the first of three major approval processes required to progress the development, which aims to honour the commitment of the 100,000 Australians who have served our country over the past 30 years."

Parliament's Public Works Committee is yet to give its sign-off, and *The Australian Financial Review* understands concerns raised by the government's own Australia Heritage Council remain a key concern for committee members.

The demolition of the award-winning Anzac Hall and other changes have been criticised by a range of groups, including the Australian Institute of Architects.

The Australian chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites – an advisory body to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation world heritage committee – said the memorial's inclusion on the national heritage list meant a high commitment to protection was required in any changes.

Mr Morrison and former director Brendan Nelson are among leading advocates of the redevelopment. The Prime Minister said in August no funds intended to support veterans' mental health would be lost to the project.

Heritage Guardians campaigner David Stephens said the approval was a poor outcome.

"It was always going to be a political decision, from the time the Prime Minister announced the project in November 2018," Dr Stephens said.

“Much of the consultation process since then has been window dressing.”