

War Memorial redevelopment will force Anzac Day ceremonies to move



By [Katina Curtis](#)

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This year's dramatically reduced Anzac Day ceremony at the Australian War Memorial will be the last that veterans will be able to attend at the national place of remembrance until at least 2024 because of a planned \$500 million redevelopment.

The War Memorial has submitted plans for approval of early works that include removing the Stone of Remembrance, excavating the parade ground, cutting down all but six of the 32 trees at the building's front and erecting a six-metre-high fence in front of the site.

A timeline of the nine-year redevelopment project submitted to federal Parliament's public works committee shows the southern entrance works are expected to last until September 2023.

COVID-19 restrictions mean this year's Anzac dawn service at the War Memorial is restricted to 4200 people, less than a quarter of the usual attendance. Tickets are already sold out. The mid-morning national ceremony, which usually attracts about 10,000 people, will be restricted to 3000.

Both events are traditionally held on the memorial's parade ground, with wreaths laid on the remembrance stone by dignitaries including the Prime Minister and Governor-General.

A War Memorial spokesman said the institution is seeking approval to move the Stone of Remembrance to the side of the building.

“The Memorial intends to conduct major ceremonial events such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day on the western grounds with the Stone of Remembrance remaining the focus of ceremonies,” he said. “The proposed new parade ground has an expected completion date prior to Anzac Day 2024.”



Prime Minister Scott Morrison lays a wreath at the Australian War Memorial during the 2020 Remembrance Day ceremony.*CREDIT: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN*

The early works also include the [controversial demolition](#) of the award-winning Anzac Hall. The hall closes to the public from Monday and AWM director Matt Anderson told Senate estimates last week that the process of removing all exhibits from it is expected to take three months.



An artist's impression of the Australian War Memorial's \$500 million redevelopment. *CREDIT: WAR MEMORIAL*

Critics of the redevelopment say the scope of these early works is such that it makes the final approval of the entire project – yet to be submitted to the National Capital Authority – all but inevitable.

Australian Institute of Architects spokeswoman Clare Cousins said the processes had been disappointing.

She was outraged that the demolition of Anzac Hall and removal of more than 60 trees from the site was portrayed as “minor works” and split off from approval of the final work.

“It's completely underhanded, it's completely inappropriate,” she said. “None of these things should be proceeding until the whole project has got the green light, and it doesn't.”

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David Stephens, whose Honest History website has largely driven the campaign against the redevelopment, said if the authority approved the early works and then found the rest of the project didn't meet its criteria, "you're stuck with having agreed to it".

"The three big things – demolish Anzac Hall, massacre 100 trees and do a huge excavation at the front – are not preparation in the same sense as putting up a fence is. They're things without which the project could not happen," he said.

The War Memorial's former head of buildings and services, Stewart Mitchell, says the removal of the trees and the planned new entrance and parade ground were "an extraordinary change to what was a uniquely Australian and dignified site" that would transform it into a "formalised, hard surface, even quasi-military".

"The sense of isolation of the main building in the landscape, that memorial, is really important," he said.

"They say they haven't touched the facade of the main building but that's such a simplistic view of how that view up Anzac Parade will change. The reality is it's only part of the impact."

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War Memorial chairman Kerry Stokes launched the \$500 million redevelopment proposal with fanfare in late 2018. Since then, it has received approvals under federal environmental laws and from Parliament's public works committee. While there is bipartisan support for the project, Labor members on the public works committee issued [a rare dissenting report](#), suggesting that the War Memorial re-examine options which did not involve knocking down the 20-year-old Anzac Hall.

The AWM and supporters of the redevelopment say it's necessary to give the institution more space to tell the stories of all Australians who have served, particularly in modern conflicts, and to improve access and circulation through the building.

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