

<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/dangerous-precedent-architects-seek-war-memorial-redevelopment-halt-20200822-p55ocz>

'Dangerous precedent': Architects seek War Memorial redevelopment halt



Tom McIlroy *Political reporter*

Aug 23, 2020 – 1.32pm

Leading Australian architects have written to federal MPs asking them to block approval for [redevelopment of the Australian War Memorial](#), part of a last-ditch attempt to stop a half-billion-dollar expansion.

The Australian Institute of Architects wrote to lower house MPs, cabinet ministers and Labor's frontbench last week, opposing the demolition of the historic Canberra institution's Anzac Hall and warning important heritage values could be lost.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Labor and the War Memorial director Matt Anderson support the major upgrades, [designed to better commemorate veterans of more recent conflicts, modernise the memorial and improve visitor experiences](#).

But growing opposition continues, including from former directors and senior public servants, some veterans' advocates and heritage experts.

Clare Cousins, national president of the Institute of Architects until 2019, asked MPs to reject the redevelopment plan because it "fails to protect the heritage of the AWM for all Australians" and includes the "wasteful and unnecessary" demolition of Anzac Hall, completed in 2001 at a cost of about \$17 million.

She cited a lack of due process in rollout of the plans, which would expand the memorial's footprint by 80 per cent, add a new entry and a British Museum-style glass atrium.

"We appreciate there may be a need to increase the memorial's capacity, including some expansion, but we oppose doing this in a way that is wasteful, destructive, and damaging to the heritage value and integrity of the site," she wrote.

"Over-development will lead to significant adverse loss of the qualities that make the AWM nationally significant."

The Australian Financial Review has been told some MPs have strong reservations about the project's price tag and scope, with some privately arguing more funding should go to veterans' services, including mental health.

Ms Cousins said the institute fully supported the memorial's purpose in commemorating the sacrifice of Australians who have died in war but changes to the project should be made.

Legislative and heritage approval processes are under way. The letter called on Parliament's public works committee to hold off on a final recommendation until a separate assessment under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is completed.

"We oppose the planned unnecessary destruction of Anzac Hall, a building that was painstakingly designed and crafted to honour this service to our nation," Ms Cousins wrote.

"Allowing legislated heritage protections to be so blatantly disregarded in this instance, and for such a prominent public institution, would set a dangerous precedent for other iconic sites."

The Australian chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, a leading advocacy organisation for the protection of monuments and an advisory body to the United Nation's UNESCO world heritage committee, has warned against heritage damage.

The organisation's Australian chapter chief Helen Lardner told the Environment Department only moves sympathetic to the building's history should be considered.

Mr Anderson says the memorial will remain a place of quiet reflection and healing for veterans and their families, with additional space allowing exhibitions of contemporary service to be added.

He said heritage elements, including the historic facade, would be protected.

Former director Brendan Nelson has hit out at some critics, accusing them of being "disingenuous" and motivated by resentment.

Seven West Media boss and recently reappointed memorial chair Kerry Stokes is a strong supporter of the project.

Tom McIlroy reports from the federal press gallery at Parliament House. *Connect with Tom on [Twitter](#). Email Tom at thomas.mcilroy@afrc.com*

