

Former veterans' minister warns of War Memorial heritage risk



Tom McIlroy *Political reporter*

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A former veterans' affairs and defence personnel minister is lobbying MPs for a rethink of [redevelopment plans for the Australian War Memorial](#), warning that expert heritage concerns have not been addressed.

Alan Griffin – [a longtime Victorian MP and Rudd government minister](#) – says the historic Canberra memorial is among Australia's most important buildings and must be protected, questioning the works' \$500 million price tag.



Former veterans' affairs and defence personnel minister Alan Griffin, with Kevin Rudd in 2012. **Alex Ellinghausen**

He has used meetings at Parliament House to echo concerns from the government's own heritage watchdog, despite strong support from the Coalition and Labor.

"Is there a need to better tell the story of those who have sacrificed and been part of the service of so many in peacekeeping and in more recent conflicts? Absolutely," Mr Griffin told *The Australian Financial Review*.

"The question of whether this is the best way to do it is, I think, the key question. That goes to the size of it and the actual way it is being done."

Heritage advocates, historians, former directors and some veterans' groups believe the scale of the upgrade, the cost and changes to the building's appearance all risk damaging its revered status.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison calls the plan "tremendous". [He said no funds intended for veterans' mental health will be lost.](#)

Labor has offered strong bipartisan support. Reviews are under way by Parliament's public works committee and the Environment Department, but some MPs privately argue part of the promised funding should go to veterans' mental health services.

Mr Griffin said it was "ludicrous" to suggest the cost wouldn't affect spending in other parts of the veterans portfolio.

"I've also been concerned an awful lot of people who have expertise in heritage matters have voiced very serious concerns about what's been proposed."

Mr Griffin points to concerns by the government's Australian Heritage Council. Chaired former Liberal minister David Kemp, the council warned against some major changes and said the heritage values of the site could be compromised.

Expansion of the Australian War Memorial, including plans for a glazed atrium link, has attracted criticism.

He said the planned demolition of Anzac Hall, opened in 2001, should be reconsidered. [The Australian Institute of Architects is campaigning against the demolition.](#)

"I do think when you have serious concerns raised about the heritage issues with respect so somewhere as iconic as the War Memorial, you've got to take those into very serious consideration before you move down the track," Mr Griffin said.

Memorial director Matt Anderson told Senate estimates this week the concerns of the Heritage Council and others were addressed in about 50 changes to the design.

"When you consider that there are also 167 submissions and a significant number were also in favour of what we're doing and how we're doing it, we obviously took [critics] views seriously."

"We've responded, we've amended our documentation, we've amended our designs based on their concerns," he said.

"I don't accept there's a growing chorus of discontent. The people that we speak to, the majority of the people that we speak to, are in favour of it."

Historian David Stephens said the memorial was overstating public support. More than 70 eminent Australians have signed an open letter opposing the plan.

"The opinion of the Heritage Council seems to have been given no more weight than any of the other 166 submissions on the work," he said.

"The memorial claims that the heritage facade will be unchanged. Yet, the memorial's own illustrations give the lie to this assertion."

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