

Government's heritage adviser warns against War Memorial redevelopment



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The federal government's principal heritage adviser has warned [a proposed redevelopment of the Australian War Memorial](#) will have a negative impact on the iconic site.

[Liberal Party elder David Kemp](#), the chair of the government's own Australian Heritage Council, said the body could not support the assessment that the \$500 million plan won't see serious changes to the heritage values of the site. He called for a rethink of aspects of the redesign.

The council advised the federal government on heritage matters, including nominations to the national and Commonwealth heritage lists.

In a submission to a review of the proposed designs, the council questioned the main argument in favour of a large expansion of the Canberra memorial, suggesting operational changes and better use of technology could more effectively use the existing footprint, without the need for larger exhibition spaces.

"The intent of the project to acknowledge and incorporate continuing arenas of conflict and military operation is commendable," Dr Kemp wrote.

"The documentation provided, however, while addressing alternatives relating to structural expansion, appears to have not addressed options such as operational and other functional changes that could minimise the need for additional space.

"Physical expansion to support the display of large objects such as submarines and aircraft is not a sustainable intent over the long term and, in the current circumstances, cannot be achieved without significantly impacting listed heritage values."

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has championed the project, and said not a single cent of funds intended to support veterans' mental health will be lost to the works.

Support from veterans' groups, members of the public and other organisations was recorded in the public submissions.

But the scale of the redevelopment has been criticised, including by veterans' advocates, former public servants, heritage experts and the Australian Institute of Architects.

The Heritage Council said aspects of the plan should be seriously reconsidered to avoid negative effects on listed heritage values, including controversial plans to demolish the existing Anzac Hall, the redesign and expansion of the parade ground and expansion of the C.E.W. Bean building.

"Regrettably the council cannot support the conclusion that the proposed redevelopment will not have a serious impact on the listed heritage values of the site and recommends that the matters above be given serious attention," wrote Dr Kemp, who was John Howard's education minister and is a former president of the Liberals' Victorian division.

Former War Memorial director Brendan Nelson, current chairman Kerry Stokes, who is also Seven West Media chairman, and current director Matt Anderson support the plan, which is designed to better commemorate veterans of more recent conflicts, modernise the memorial and improve visitor experience.

Mr Anderson believes it will better position the memorial as a place to honour Australians who have served and died overseas.

Dr Nelson has criticised a group of former directors and staff who are opposed, accusing some of being "disingenuous" and motivated by resentment.

Parliament's public works committee is conducting its own review. While the project has bipartisan support, *The Australian Financial Review* has been told some MPs have strong reservations about the price tag and size, with some privately arguing more funding should go to veterans' mental health services.

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.

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