

Kerry Stokes' controversial stint on War Memorial board to be extended



By [Rob Harris](#)

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Billionaire media mogul Kerry Stokes has been reappointed as a member of the council of the Australian War Memorial for a further 12 months amid ongoing controversy over its \$500 million redevelopment and expansion.

A noted philanthropist and generous supporter of veterans and their families, Mr Stokes been on the council of the war memorial in Canberra since 2007 and was appointed chairman in November 2015.

His position as chairman has become increasingly controversial and was last year described by a former director of the institution as “untenable” in the wake of the Brereton report, after Mr Stokes promised to use a fund he created to [help cover the legal costs of SAS members accused of war crimes](#).

Mr Stokes' term was due to expire last year but he received what was then a rare extension for 12 months because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Council members are usually granted three-year terms.

Veterans' Affairs Minister Darren Chester said Mr Stokes' extensive experience, leadership and dedication would continue to benefit the council and its ongoing stability, particularly as the memorial progresses through the early stages of its major upgrade.

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“The work of the council is crucial in raising national awareness of the service and sacrifice of our current and former Australian Defence Force members and their families, and as a member of the council and during his time as chair Kerry has done an outstanding job,” Mr Chester said.

“Kerry is a passionate supporter and advocate for the Australian War Memorial and I thank him for his contribution to date and congratulate him on his reappointment.”

The council of the Australian War Memorial, which includes former prime minister Tony Abbott, director of Aspen Medical Glenn Keys and former Royal Australian Air Force nursing officer Sharon Bown, is responsible for the conduct and control of the affairs of the memorial.

Mr Stokes, an 80-year-old self-made billionaire, is chairman of Seven West Media and Seven Group Holdings. His personal generosity towards the memorial dates back decades, including the purchase of a VC medal awarded to Captain Alfred Shout for hand-to-hand combat at the Lone Pine trenches in Gallipoli for a then world-record price of \$1 million at auction in 2006.

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Mr Stokes has also personally guaranteed [the \\$500 million redevelopment](#) currently under way [will not run over budget](#) and purchased several medals that he donated to the museum. Some within the government had expected him not to seek another three-year term because of health issues. There has been growing public criticism of his position amid his public and private support for soldiers accused of war crimes in Afghanistan, including Ben Roberts-Smith, who is on taking leave as boss of the Seven Network’s Queensland operations.

Former chief historian of the Australian War Memorial Peter Stanley, who worked at the War Memorial for 27 years including as principal historian, said last year [Mr Stokes was “discredited by his uncritical association with the accused”](#).

Former director [Brendon Kelson also said it was “totally inappropriate”](#) for Mr Stokes as the chair of the institution to be supporting anyone embroiled in the alleged war crimes scandal.

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