

**Question on notice no. 595**

**Portfolio question number: 1**

**2023-24 Budget estimates**

**Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, Defence Portfolio**

**Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan:** asked the Australian War Memorial on 31 May 2023—

Senator CANAVAN: I want to go to the topic I have covered a few times now, the planned exhibit for a frontier wars memorial. In 2014, the Australian War Memorial published on its website this comment:

... the Memorial has found no substantial evidence that home-grown military units, whether state colonial forces or post Federation Australian military units, ever fought against the Indigenous population of this country

I just want to confirm, as I have at other estimates, whether that's still the War Memorial's interpretation.

Mr Anderson: I think there is academic work out there now that does identify that precolonial forces—forces raised in Australia prior to the federation—were involved in what are deemed to be war-like operations, and that's what gives us the ability under our act to include them in our galleries

Senator CANAVAN: My specific question was about homegrown military units or state colonial forces. Are you saying you do have evidence for that now?

Mr Anderson: Yes, the act that governs our centre says they are forces, naval or military, raised in Australia prior to federation.

Senator CANAVAN: Have you published this new conclusion on your website?

Mr Anderson: I don't know about the website.

Senator CANAVAN: Is that comment still available on your website?

Mr Anderson: I can check; I don't know

Senator CANAVAN: Could you, on notice, provide the evidence for that conclusion?

Mr Anderson: Of course.

**Answer —**

Answer attached.

**Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**  
**Budget Estimates 2023-24 – 31 May 2023**  
**Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio**

**Question 1**

**Outcome: All Program: All**

**Topic: Frontier Wars - website**

(FADT Hansard Proof 31 May 2023, p 109)

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**Answer**

On 22 June 2023, the Australian War Memorial website was updated to include an archive section for media releases. The 2014 comment contained in a press release was moved to the Archived Media Releases on this date along with all older releases.

On 29 September 2022 the then Memorial Chairman, Dr Brendan Nelson AO, responded to a question from a journalist during a press conference, in which he advised that Council had decided that there would be a “much broader, much deeper depiction and presentation of the violence committed against Aboriginal people, initially by British, then by pastoralists, then by police and by Aboriginal militia” in the Memorial’s new galleries.

(<https://minister.dva.gov.au/news-and-media/minister/press-conference-australian-war-memorial>)

In relation to the Australian War Memorial's website, in September 2022, a copy of the Council paper *Options for the scope of the new Pre-1914 galleries regarding frontier violence*, considered at the August 2022 meeting, was subsequently published on the Memorial's website. The paper was provided in response to Question on Notice 4 from the November 2022 Budget Estimates hearing. (<https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-23-06.pdf>). The paper states:

'The definition of the Defence Force given in the *Australian War Memorial Act 1980* includes any colonial naval and military force of the Crown raised in Australia before the establishment of the Commonwealth. Naval and military development in Australian colonies followed different historical trajectories. As far as is known, the volunteer militia, artillery, and other units of the second half of the nineteenth century did not take part in frontier violence.

Other forces raised in the colonies, however, did take part in frontier violence, and some were clearly military in nature. Below are five historical examples of colonial-raised forces that did take part in frontier violence.

- (1) Macquarie's use of "Associations", New South Wales, 1816
- (2) The Black Line, Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania), 1830
- (3) Battle of Pinjarra, Western Australia, 1834
- (4) Waterloo Creek massacre, New South Wales, 1838
- (5) Native Police, Queensland, 1848–c. 1910.'

The article *Proclamation board, Tasmanian frontier era* (<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/governor-daveys-proclamation>) was published on the Australian War Memorial's website on 22 May 2020. It states 'Governor Arthur had been prosecuting a military campaign against Aboriginal Tasmanians since declaring martial law on 1 November 1828. Before that, in April 1828, Arthur had issued a proclamation to the effect that Aboriginal people would require a passport in order to be in the "settled districts" of the island – the corridor between Hobart and Launceston. Settlers who shot Aboriginal people would not be prosecuted for murder.'

The article also states 'During October and November 1830, he instigated the infamous "General Movement", often known as the "Black Line", a manoeuvre involving more than 2,200 military personnel, settlers, and convicts marching from the north to the south, conducted with the aim of sweeping the Aboriginal population into the Tasman Peninsula.'

The article *Colonial period, 1788–1901* (<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/colonial>) page on the Australian War Memorial's website includes the following information: 'From then until 1870, 25 British infantry regiments and several smaller artillery and engineer units were stationed in the colonies. One role of the troops was to guard Australia against external attack, but their main job was to maintain civil order, particularly against the threat of convict uprisings, and to suppress the resistance of the Aboriginal population to British settlement.'

'Although much of the military training undertaken by volunteers in the colonies was aimed at meeting external threats, European settlement was accompanied by a protracted and undeclared war against Australia's Indigenous inhabitants. Fighting was localised and sporadic, following the frontiers of European settlement across the continent and continuing in remote areas of central and Western Australia until the 1930s. British soldiers (as distinct from armed police and civilians) became involved only rarely, notably during the period of martial law in Tasmania between 1828 and 1832, and in New South Wales in the mid-1820s and late 1830s. Military authorities did not usually regard Aborigines as posing sufficient threat to warrant the expense of committing military forces to pursue them, and most of the fighting was conducted by the settlers, assisted by police.'

A description of the artwork, *Quirriip* by Laurel Nannup, which is a part of the Australian War Memorial's National Collection, is available on the Australian War Memorial's website (<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2679424>). The description includes the following information: 'The Pinjarra Massacre, also known as the Battle of Pinjarra, was an attack that occurred at Pinjarra, Western Australia, on a group of up to 80 Noongar people by a detachment of 25 soldiers, police and settlers led by Governor James Stirling in October 1834. It is considered one of the most notorious massacres carried out on Aboriginal people during the Frontier Wars, particularly due to the calculated nature to which it was planned. The massacre was made in response to continuing requests for military protection from a small group of settlers on the Murray River, and followed a series of confrontations in the early days of the Swan River colony that had culminated in the payback killing of an ex-soldier.'