

# ALP pushed Memorial to recognise frontier wars

Tom McLroy

The Australian War Memorial announced plans to expand its recognition of colonial Indigenous massacres after the Albanese government indicated it favoured the move, a major shift after years of Coalition resistance.

War Memorial council chairman Brendan Nelson last month announced plans to better document Australia's frontier wars and violence against Indigenous communities, promising a "deeper depiction" of the brutal violence that came with European settlement.

The reversal came after criticism from Indigenous leaders and historians who argued the memorial should tell the story of aggression against First Nations people by non-Indigenous forces, alongside the history of major overseas conflicts.

The Australian Financial Review has been told the government, through Veterans' Affairs Minister Matt Keogh, indicated to the memorial's governing council that Labor would view positively the creation of new exhibits on the frontier wars.

The shift comes during a controversial \$500 million redevelopment of the historic Canberra memorial, designed to better honour Australians who have served and died in more recent fighting, including in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dr Nelson, a former Liberal defence minister, served as the director of the



Brendan Nelson with Veterans' Affairs Minister Matt Keogh at the Australian War Memorial. PHOTO: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

memorial for seven years before becoming council chairman. He previously said it was the place of the National Museum of Australia to document the frontier wars, not the War Memorial.

The change has also rankled the Coalition.

Opposition veterans' affairs spokesman Barnaby Joyce said yesterday the

Liberal and National parties "opposed any move that could put the Australian War Memorial at the centre of partisan political debate".

Mr Joyce said shadow cabinet believed the memorial should only commemorate Australian servicemen and women who fought external enemies.

He said the planned Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander cultural precinct, set to be built on the other side of Lake Burley Griffin, should recognise the frontier wars.

"The fundamental element is that the War Memorial was built in sacred recognition of wars that Australians fought as a nation, unified against an external foe. It is not to be a memorial for conflicts within Australia," Mr

Joyce said. "The truth of both is absolute but the fundamental element is different."

"There are many memorials in Australia and in Canberra that represent the ultimate sacrifice of the person who lays down their life for others in a noble cause, but they are not all in the Australian War Memorial.

"This does not judge the value of those lives as different."

Known as Ngurra, the new \$320 million Indigenous cultural precinct was announced by the former Morrison government.

"It's positioning between the Australian War Memorial and the parliament, by its very location, is a better philosophical representation of the issues pertinent to internal conflict as opposed to a common sacrifice against an external foe," Mr Joyce said.

"Conflicts within Australia that pitted Australians against other Australians in our own land, in some instances internecine, should be represented and discussed in a memorial that takes into account this significant difference, and not at the Australian War Memorial which has its philosophical remit in the carnage suffered by those who went to fight for Australia in the First World War."

The memorial redevelopment has experienced a \$50 million budget blowout, blamed on rising costs of materials and labour. It will cost about \$550 million.

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