

The Hon. Scott Morrison, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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19 June, 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

\$498M AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL EXPANSION

The Australian War Memorial has been funded most generously in recent years, but the announcement last November of a \$498m Memorial expansion surprised many, following Government spending of around \$350m on the Centenary of Anzac.

The announcement attracted strong criticism from historians, architects, museum persons, award-winning writers and many distinguished Australians.

In April the Memorial released its consultant's Options Assessment Report on the expansion. The Report considers options to meet the demand, basically, for space to accommodate a growing collection of retired Defence aircraft, vehicles and large technology employed in association with Australian servicemen and women in recent and current conflicts, mainly in the Middle East.

The Memorial's chosen option requires the demolition of the built-for-purpose and highly-awarded Anzac Hall, just 18 years old. Condemned by the Australian Institute of Architects and leading individuals - this would be an act of architectural vandalism. This is key among a number of issues with the option, and it should be noted it has received no endorsement from any of the Memorial's three last directors.

An obvious alternative, expansion of the Memorial's second campus at Mitchell in the ACT, was among the first to be dismissed.

That campus was set up in 1978 with a world-class conservation facility, now the Treloar Conservation Centre. And in 1994 a state-of-the-art facility was added, now Treloar C, for storage and exhibition of aircraft, vehicles and large technology.

The Memorial now has a major precinct in Mitchell and confidently predicts it will satisfy the institution's aircraft, vehicles and large technology collection storage - and sometime exhibition - requirements, for the next 100 years. The first stage of this development, Treloar E, is open and set to serve Memorial needs for the next 8 - 9 years.

Respected museum professionals believe Mitchell, logistically and by location, is the most appropriate site for the future storage and exhibition of all the Memorial's aircraft, vehicles and large technology collection, with some historical exceptions.

The Mitchell campus is well known to military hardware and large technology devotees and enthusiasts. Visitor access is facilitated by light rail and both the National Museum of Australia and National Archives have substantial premises nearby. The campus is presently open to the public only infrequently, but that is an alterable management decision.

When finished, the total cost of the Memorial's Mitchell storage and exhibition development for the next 100 years should not exceed \$100m.

The Australian War Memorial is widely regarded as one of the most significant memorials of its type in the world. It exists to commemorate sacrifice and service of Australians in war and advance understanding of the nation's experience of war. It is not a military (hardware) museum, nor a structural commodity to be rejigged at will.

The expansion - primarily for recently retired space-consuming large objects - would be an unwarranted and indulgent duplication of the Mitchell development already underway and an extravagant use of astronomically expensive space. The Memorial requires no 'window dressing' and some, at least, of the \$498m could be put to better purpose in the interests of other national institutions, veterans and their families.

The Government should drop the Australian War Memorial expansion and support the cost-effective and practical Mitchell alternative to meet the quality storage, conservation, maintenance and exhibition demands of the Memorial's large objects collection.

(C.E.W.Bean, founding father of the Australian War Memorial, once wrote, " the national memorial building...should not be colossal in scale but rather a gem of its kind ".)

Yours sincerely,



Brendon Kelson

Heritage Guardians Equity for our cultural institutions

Formerly: Director, Australian War Memorial, 1990-1994 (return of the Unknown Australian Soldier, 1993); Deputy Director, Australian War Memorial, 1982-1990; Secretary and Manager, Australian National Gallery (now NGA), 1977-1981; Assistant Secretary, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1973-1977.

(Email copies to: the Prime Minister's Office, Treasurer, Ministers for Finance and Veterans' Affairs; Leader of the Opposition and shadow ministers.)