



25 JUL 2019

Office of the Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC

MC19-002380

Mr Brendon Kelson
Brendon.kelson@gmail.com

Dear Mr Kelson,

Thank you for your letter of 19 June 2019 to Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, concerning the redevelopment of the Australian War Memorial (the Memorial). Your correspondence has been referred to the Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel, the Hon Darren Chester MP. The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf.

The redevelopment of the Memorial will record and tell the stories of the more than 100,000 Australians who have served on peacekeeping operations in East Timor, Afghanistan, Solomon Islands, Iraq or on humanitarian operations. Today's servicemen and servicewomen are returning home to a country that has no idea of what they have done and does not understand their service or the sacrifices they have made. At present, many young servicemen and servicewomen are of the view that their stories are not being told.

The impact of Vietnam veterans' stories not being told for too long is instructive. Many of the men and women who served in that conflict only began to come to terms with their service after the 'Welcome Home' parade in 1987, which prompted greater public understanding of what they had endured and what they had done.

This is not a mistake the Australian Government wishes to make with modern veterans. In that context, I would encourage you to view some of the filmed interviews with veterans and their families and hear them, in their own words, explain the healing role the Memorial plays for them. These interviews can be found at www.awm.gov.au/futureplans.

One of the interviews is with former Australian Army Private Jason Safaric who suffers both post-traumatic stress disorder and physical injuries as a result of his service in East Timor and Iraq. He now needs Ivy, his assistance dog, to help him in day-to-day life.

Jason was also a 'soldier in residence' at the Memorial, a program which offers the opportunity for wounded, injured or ill Army members to participate in a range of activities at the Memorial and learn about the visitor-facing services and back-of-house operations. It gives them a chance to see how the Memorial tells their stories and how the public appreciate their service. In his video, Jason explains how his time at the Memorial helped him and how it can help others.

Many other veterans who visit the Memorial agree. Warrant Officer Ben Sime, MG speaks of the importance of sharing his story and showing young Australians what today's servicemen and servicewomen are doing. Lieutenant Colonel Deborah Warren Smith speaks from personal experience of the therapeutic value of having her story told as a peacekeeper and veteran.

The Memorial's redevelopment will tell stories like those of Jason, Ben and Deborah, and those of the other members with whom they served. Importantly, conducting the redevelopment now will ensure we are able to record their stories, in their words and be able to share those stories to the more than one million visitors to the Memorial each year.

It will also see the Memorial create dedicated spaces for veterans and their families to retreat, reflect and come to terms with their service. It will ensure the Memorial is a place not only to remember the dead, but to honour and help those who have returned from service in our name, in our uniform and under our flag.

The new exhibition space created by the expansion will enable the Memorial to tell the stories of Australian peacekeeping and humanitarian operations more fully than we currently have space to do. Importantly, the Memorial has commenced reaching out to veterans of these operations to record their stories and to ask for donations of records and objects to help fill these new galleries. I am sure you can see that the redevelopment is intended to build on the Memorial's role as a place of solemn remembrance, education and healing.

Addressing your suggestion of the Mitchell site as an alternative to the redevelopment of the Campbell site, this is not under consideration. The original intent of the Mitchell development — and specifically the construction of the new Treloar E LTO Storage Facility — was to provide over 5,000 sqm of environmentally controlled additional storage for the National Collection.

The Mitchell site forms part of a sophisticated logistic strategy for greater storage capability for the National Collection. The development of a long-term strategy for future storage across the Treloar and Campbell sites, supported by appropriate planning tools, will inform the movement of those large technology objects as you mention as well as smaller storage items to the Treloar E facility. The strategy will also provide a plan to maximise the utility and efficiency of storage within the current facilities and prepare for the management of the National Collection during the redevelopment of the Campbell site.

I hope this provides some insight into the decision to fund the redevelopment of the Memorial and how it benefits veteran health and the broader national interest.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Curtin', with a long, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Robert Curtin
Chief of Staff