

Exclusive

# ‘Adverse impact’: government warned on War Memorial redevelopment



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[A major expansion of the Australian War Memorial](#) was approved after a review warned that wide-reaching and permanent changes would diminish and obscure the building’s heritage values, and could damage protected views from Parliament House across Canberra’s central triangle.

[The \\$500 million expansion was approved in December](#), despite officials warning the size of new areas for exhibitions, visitor services and functions would reduce the significance of the iconic 1940s stone building and pull the memorial’s focus away from commemoration.



The Australian War Memorial says expansion will allow recognition of 100,000 Australians who have served in the past 30 years. **Alex Ellinghausen**

The assessments – revealed in documents released under freedom of information rules – come as Parliament’s public works committee prepares to sign off on the cost of the project next week.

*AFR Weekend* understands some members of the multi-party committee opposed the approval and will release a dissenting report.

The memorial agreed to a series of changes to the plans after public consultation and concerns from architects, heritage advocates and former staff.

Director Matt Anderson says the expansion will allow appropriate commemoration of the 100,000 Australians who have served in the past 30 years. Tenders for the work will include criteria for the participation and employment of veterans and their families.

The project has so far had bipartisan support from the Coalition and Labor. [Prime Minister Scott Morrison last year endorsed the plans as “tremendous”](#).

Assessments prepared by the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, responsible for federal heritage protections say that under plans for 24,277 square metres in additional exhibition space, “the original building’s significance is reduced, as is the significance of the commemorative spaces”.

The scale of planned new exhibition areas and physical changes to the existing buildings “outweighs and pulls focus from commemorative spaces”, the documents say.

“Despite the changes made during consultation, the development as a whole will still have a large-scale, high-intensity, permanent impact on the heritage values of the AWM by reducing the relative scale of the ceremonial spaces within the landscape.”

Key concerns outlined in the approval process include the demolition of Anzac Hall, set to be replaced by a newer building, as well as a new glazed link, and changes to entrances. Amendments agreed by the memorial reduce the heritage and visual impact of the changes.

The Parliament House vista, carefully protected since its creation as part of Canberra’s early design, could be changed through the introduction of a new glazed atrium, visible above the main building’s parapet.

Mr Anderson has committed to maintaining the memorial’s solemnity [as a place of quiet reflection and honour for fallen Australians](#).

Canberra’s National Capital Authority is required to sign off on the project.

Historian David Stephens said Environment Minister Sussan Ley approved the work despite concerns from the Australian Heritage Council, heritage experts, former directors and senior officers of the memorial.

“The public works committee had more submissions on the memorial project than on any project since the committee began work in 1913; over three-quarters of the submissions were unfavourable to the memorial’s plans,” he said.

“When the memorial itself took public submissions last year on the heritage aspects of the project, nearly 60 per cent of submissions were opposed.

“Public servants implementing heritage legislation are in a difficult position when the Prime Minister has already agreed to a project and funding for it. Approval processes become little more than window-dressing or tinkering at the edges.”

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