

HONEST HISTORY

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MEDIA RELEASE: War Memorial misses opportunity to clarify confusion about Frontier Wars: FOI fudging

Australian War Memorial Council Chair, Dr Brendan Nelson, made some remarks at the Memorial on 29 September about the Memorial's intentions regarding the Frontier Wars. Since then, confusion has reigned. The Memorial has now missed an opportunity to clarify matters through full disclosure under Freedom of Information.

'The Memorial's failure to respond properly to this FOI request made in good faith calls into question its willingness to make real changes in the way it deals with the Frontier Wars – and to bring Australians along with it. To put it crudely, the Memorial is playing silly buggers – and doing it arrogantly. The future direction of the Memorial is too important to be left to its unrepresentative Council and rattled senior management', said Honest History website editor, Dr David Stephens.

'The record since Dr Nelson's off-the-cuff remark a month ago shows confused and conflicting accounts of what the Memorial Council decided. We have gone from the Memorial providing "a much broader, much deeper depiction and presentation" of the Australian Frontier Wars to something "of modest dimensions". We gave the Memorial a chance to clarify the confusion through the Freedom of Information process but it has fudged it and faked it.'

[A new post on the Honest History website](#) has the details. Since Dr Nelson's 29 September statement there has been an attempt to clarify it from Council member Major General Greg Melick, who is also national president of the RSL, and a further statement from Dr Nelson.

Honest History and Heritage Guardians put in a request under FOI for a copy of the Memorial Council Minutes and other papers covering the Council's discussion of how it would deal with the Frontier Wars in future. The Memorial refused to release the six pages of Minutes but released a heavily redacted version of the Agenda paper that the Council considered.

'Rather than relying on technical provisions of the FOI regime to conceal information the Memorial should be bringing Australians into its confidence about what it intends and that can only happen if it releases the complete Minutes and supporting documentation', Dr Stephens said. 'What is in prospect may or may not be a fundamental change in the Memorial's role, but we won't be able to make a judgement about that until we see the documents. Without them, all we have is the garbled accounts of Dr Nelson and General Melick plus a partial account in a newspaper article.'

Dr Stephens said people who had welcomed the Memorial's apparent change of direction needed to look closely at the record of the last few weeks.

The Australian Frontier Wars were fought between First Australians on one side and settlers and police and military forces on the other, between 1788 and at least 1928. They involved both resistance by First Australians and massacres of Indigenous men, women and children. Perhaps 60,000 First Australians died, as well as a much smaller number of settlers.

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