

Huge Australian War Memorial building project delays fuel doubt



By [Steve Evans](#)

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Construction at the Australian War Memorial is on a "revised schedule".

Picture by Elesia Kurtz

The \$550 million project to revamp the Australian War Memorial appears to have suffered substantial delays - though it says the final completion in five years will still be on budget and on time.

The Canberra Times can reveal that planned government funding in the upcoming financial year has dropped by nearly \$200 million as the timetable for construction shifts.

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The controversial scheme to increase the AWM's exhibition space is now operating under what managers call a "revised construction schedule". The fall in the coming financial year's allocated funding - its "equity injection" - has prompted critics to say that less money coming from the federal government implies less planned work on the ground. And a slow-down in work, they argue, makes the promised completion date less likely to be achieved.

The AWM denies that. It says that despite its "revised construction schedule", the revamp will still be done by 2028, and on the latest budget of \$550 million.

"It is common for the sequencing of specific jobs to alternate over a number of years. It does not mean the project is over budget or the timeline has changed," the memorial's director, Matt Anderson, said.

The timing was always meant to be flexible is the memorial's argument. The revision to the construction schedule emerged in official figures from the federal government about funding of the expansion.

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The government allocates money to the War Memorial for each financial year.

A year ago, the official figure estimated for the upcoming financial year, starting in July, was \$194 million, but now the figure has fallen to \$7.5 million.

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And over the next three financial years combined (2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26), funds from the government are now officially put at \$130 million less than previously stated.

This drop prompts opponents to say that spending is lower because of delays - and delays, they argue, mean a longer time-frame to completion, and perhaps also a blow-out in costs.

The "Honest History" group which opposes the expansion and which pores over the funding details in government papers says that the AWM's explanation (of a revised schedule but completion at the same time on the same budget) isn't plausible.

"I don't believe that they can still get it done on time and on budget. That's not plausible," David Stephens of Honest History said. "They haven't got the work coming through at the pace they need it to."

He wants the Auditor-General to look hard at the figures. He believes that there hasn't been enough hard-headed questioning of the whole project because of reverence for the Anzac legend.

There may be several reasons for delays. Exceptionally heavy rain in the past two years may have made construction much harder.

The project is developing on three sides of the original domed War Memorial building, including substantial work underneath. It may be that some of the soil is a lot rockier than originally anticipated.

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Last year, severe skills shortages [led to a \\$50 million increase](#) in the total cost of the project.

The War Memorial remains open to the public despite all the construction work going on there.