



Community Consultation – Block 3 Section 39 Campbell Australian War Memorial – Early Works Approval Application

This submission is made on behalf of Professional Historians Australia (PHA), which represents over 500 professionally accredited historians across all Australian states and territories. Many members work in heritage positions that aim to preserve both the natural and cultural heritage of Australia. They therefore take a strong interest in significant cultural landscapes. The Australian War Memorial (AWM) is one of the most significant and is acknowledged as such by its inclusion on the National Heritage List.

Summary

The plantings of the trees surrounding the AWM are part of a designed landscape setting. These trees are integral to the unique Australian nature of the spirit of the place and its contemplative memorial function. To remove them risks the place of the AWM on the National Heritage List.

Issues

PHA is most concerned that the proposal to remove significant trees in the AWM grounds rests on insufficient study, analysis and assessment of the surrounding landscape. Heritage values can only be protected if they are fully understood. To proceed with the proposal without this knowledge would be to risk destroying or diminishing the national heritage values of the AWM.

The immediate, well-planted setting of the AWM was designed to integrate the building with its wider landscape setting on the lower slopes of Mt Ainslie as a terminal point of the land axis of the Parliament House vista. This will be destroyed if over 100 trees are removed from the site in order to make way for a new exhibition hall and altered front access to the building.

PHA understands that the National Capital Authority (NCA) is not considering the wider redevelopment plans, but we still wish to reiterate our strong opposition to that plan, which is a misdirection of half a billion dollars and undermines the AWM's original purpose 'to commemorate the sacrifice of those Australians who have died in war or on operational service'. Moreover, it is vital that the process of restructuring the AWM and its surrounds be assessed as a complete project.

According to the Heritage Impact Statement (p. 25), no investigation (archival or physical) of previous landscape work has been undertaken. Best practice heritage conservation requires such a study to properly inform and mitigate the type of drastic landscape modifications currently proposed. Without this, it is not possible to ensure that heritage values are not adversely affected. The proposed landscape design for redevelopment is also missing from the documentation.

The current proposal to remove mature trees and redesign the parade ground and paths diminishes the designed landscape values of the AWM. The proposal overlooks the contribution of these trees as a mixed group planting to the immediate surrounding cultural landscape and as wildlife habitats. Even with partial replacement of new trees (inevitably small saplings by comparison) the precinct's birdlife will be reduced for years to come.

PHA urges the NCA not to approve this proposal.

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