# Talking points on the proposed extensions to the Australian War Memorial

(Note: these points amplify those in the template letter)

## Right objective, wrong plan

* We should honour Australia’s war dead, but our respect for them should not be measured in dollars and a further grand construction.
* The plan as proposed seems to be as much about the proponents’ desire for a legacy as it is about commemoration.

## Higher priorities exist

* The extensions would squander resources that are desperately needed elsewhere for:
  + services of direct benefit to veterans and their families;
  + foreign aid, especially to the countries where we have fought our wars;
  + our desperately cash-strapped national cultural institutions, which have had to undergo crushing ‘efficiency dividends’ year after year.

## Unbalanced allocation between national cultural institutions

* Australia’s national cultural institutions together preserve our history and

heritage; they deserve to be treated fairly.

* Of course, our experience of war is important, but it is only one of many influences on Australia today.
* The War Memorial has been given precedence over other institutions, being treated most generously by governments over many years and contributing to an excessive militarisation of our national life, particularly for children. The Memorial is not a sacred cow and should be held properly accountable.
* This proposal follows four years’ commemoration of the Centenary of Anzac, at a cost to the Australian taxpayer of some $350 million, plus around another $230 million spent by the States and Territories and from corporate donations. The Australian total far exceeds that of any other country.

## The case has not been made

* Recent conflicts (Afghanistan, Iraq, Timor Leste) are far from ‘forgotten’; indeed, vigorous debate about them continues and premature and excessive commemoration would stifle this debate.
* Current conflicts also may be subject to public debate and the proposed direct ‘feeds’ of continuing Defence operations would stifle this debate.
* The responsibility to ‘heal’ veterans belongs with Defence and Veterans’ Affairs, not the Memorial; the Hall of Memory, containing the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier, provides adequate space for reflection.
* Despite the claims about recognition of recent conflicts and providing areas for reflection, much of the new space will be occupied by large items of equipment and a grandiose entrance foyer.
* No major museum in the world attempts – or would want to – display everything in its collection; most are happy with displaying about five per cent of their holdings at any one time.
* The Memorial’s Treloar Annex in Mitchell, ACT, was established years ago to provide environmentally-controlled space for storage *and* display of large and heavy technology; this facility could be used – or even extended at a fraction of the cost of the planned extensions.
* Displays of military technology and weapons can tell us *how* we fight, but they obscure the more important questions of *why* we fight and what our wars have achieved.

## Wilful destruction

* The planned extensions require the demolition of the barely 17 years-old Anzac Hall, recipient in 2005 of the highly regarded Sir Zelman Cowen Award for Public Architecture.
* This act of public vandalism is drawing strong and vocal objection from the Australian Institute of Architects, the designers Denton Corker Marshall and respected culturally-minded parties.

## The silences at the heart of the Memorial

* It remains a national mark of shame that the Memorial has yet to properly address Australia’s Frontier Wars, a priority that at this time should stand ahead of all others.
* There should be a dedicated Indigenous memorial within the AWM, with interpretive space to present the truth about the Frontier Wars.
* There should also be a Peace Studies centre and museum.

13 February 2019