



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT ASSOCIATION (ACT BRANCH)

The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson AO BMBS FRACP (Hon) FAMA FRSN

Director
The Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345
Canberra ACT 2601

Mr John King

President
Returned and Services League of Australia
Australian Capital Territory Branch
PO Box 481
FYSHWICK ACT 2609

Dear Dr Nelson and Mr King,

The Australian War Memorial (AWM) and Returned & Services League (RSL) would no doubt agree that ANZAC Day, including the Dawn Service and March has changed over the last 20 years or so. It has experienced a resurgence of support because the Australian community has become interested and involved. Much of this resurgence has been due to the great efforts of the AWM staff and the RSL. The day is not just for Veterans and ADF members any more. We should continue to encourage families, descendants, friends and young people to march and get involved. Let them wear their grandparent's medals on the right if they wish.

The general consensus of the members of the Royal Australian Regiment Association ACT Branch is the ANZAC Day March and National Service for 2018 was poorly executed. The changes made to the March and Service were ill-judged, and must be reconsidered and reversed for future ANZAC Day Services. Veterans were left waiting for hours in the sun on ANZAC Pde, while not being able to listen to the speeches and videos delivered at length on the AWM concourse. The March started late and then the Service was much too long. Many Veterans voted with their feet and went straight to reunions and nearby hotels after the March. As a result, there were many empty chairs for the Service, probably the reverse of what was wanted for media purposes.

We need the community bands, not just for music, but as a further demonstration of community involvement – all the band members have families too, who will come to hear them play. These volunteers have been treated shabbily by arbitrary removal, in favour of a piped music concept which did not work. We want the bands back.

The March must start on time. You cannot responsibly leave elderly Veterans standing in the heat of the sun for an hour or more. The Regiment had three Korean

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War Veterans on parade, average age 90 years, and many other elderly Veterans, who presented a health and safety risk, and had to be monitored. Water was not made available to the Veterans until after they had marched and were seated at 12:25 pm; and its distribution was very haphazard.

The concept of having speeches and videos before the march was ill-conceived. In addition to the health and safety risks created as a result, Veterans were unable to hear the speeches because they were not there. The time for (short) speeches is within the body of the Service, after Veterans have completed the March and have been seated. The Service should be restored to the shorter format used in previous years. The reasons for changing it are unclear, but they have not worked. A Service of no more than 40 minutes is appropriate.

The positioning of barriers across Anzac Parade at Blamey Crescent and Currong Street was lost on the Veterans who were south of these barriers. Was there some threat identified against the March? If there was, why weren't the barriers positioned at Constitution Avenue so as to protect all the participants? Half of the Veterans and participants had to negotiate the barriers by marching up and down kerbs which was not only chaotic but dangerous to the older Veterans.

Finally, the most important point from these observations is that potentially all of the good work of the last 20 years could be lost. The work of engaging the public, Service families and descendants is in danger of being lost and inevitably ANZAC Day will revert to just another holiday. ANZAC Day is, a day of national significance for all Australians. We must recognise this and act accordingly. Please reverse these changes and put the March and Service back where it has been in past years, an event that speaks to Veterans and the general populace.

S.J. Dunn AM
Brigadier (Retd)
President