

**ITEM                    KOKODA TRACK MEMORIAL WALKWAY**

**Department        Executive Services**

**Author Initials: AT**

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**REPORT**

I wish to report on recent developments that pose a threat to the future of our Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway (KTMW).

In a recent letter to the KTMW board, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Hon Darren Chester MP, offered \$44,000 for maintenance costs in the 2019-20 financial year, a figure representing an enormous cut to the funding of the memorial – less than a quarter of what is needed each year to keep the memorial alive.

This sudden drop in funding poses an existential threat to one of our nation's most iconic and beloved war memorials.

The Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway is a living memorial and a principal site of commemoration honouring all those who fought for Australia during World War II. It is the only Kokoda Memorial in Australia, and the only World War II commemoration in Sydney.

The walkway covers more than 800 metres from Rhodes Station to Concord Hospital right here in the City of Canada Bay, and runs along the mangrove-studded shores of Brays Bay on the Parramatta River. Annually it is visited by over 5,000 school children – providing a living link between the servicemen and women who fought for their country and our youngest generations.

At its centrepiece are magnificent granite walls bearing photographic images of the Kokoda campaign. There are also 22 audio-visual stations along the walkway, each describing a significant place or military engagement and allowing our community and visitors from further afield a direct link to the stories of sacrifice from our servicemen and women. It is also a place of reflection for patients and families visiting the memorial and rose garden.

Planted with lush tropical vegetation simulating the conditions of The Kokoda Track, this walkway is considered a special and beloved memorial site and refuge by many in our community.

It is a living memorial beloved by our community. In a speech to Federal Parliament, Member for Reid Dr Fiona Martin MP last August described the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway as “unique” and “both commemorative and didactic.” While in a recent interview with Seven News, local Kokoda veteran Reg Chard stated the walkway is all that he lives for.

Thanks to pressure from local veterans, the KTMW board and Council, the Department of Veterans' Affairs last week offered the board a lifeline of one year's funding of \$186,000.

This is a short term solution when what our community needs is a long term commitment.

The KTMW board cannot prepare for and secure the memorial's future on a year to year basis – the Federal Government must move to secure the future of this local treasure.

There is currently an active online petition started by a community member and supported by the KTMW board which calls for at least three years of funding from the Federal Government. I believe it is important that Council amplify this petition in order to build pressure on the Federal Government on this matter.

The KTMW board requires a funding commitment of \$186,000 per year from the Federal Government for at least the next three years. This will allow the KTMW board the resources to continue its important work and will also allow them the time to look at resources and consider options to secure the long term future of the walkway.

Because it is a living, ever-evolving memorial and an educational resource, the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway forms a link between the past and present. It is imperative that the life and legacy of this beloved site is secured for future generations to come.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. THAT Council promote the aforementioned online petition to the local community.
2. THAT the Mayor write to the Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Leader of the Opposition Anthony Albanese, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Richard Marles, Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness Jason Clare, Minister for Veterans' Affairs Darren Chester, Shadow Minister for Veteran's Affairs Shayne Neumann and Member for Reid Dr Fiona Martin requesting at least three years of funding for the operational costs for the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway.