Good Afternoon

My name is Bill Woolmore and I am the Secretary of the Victorian Committee of the National Boer War Memorial Association.

My colleagues here are:

Lieutenant Colonel Graham Lockwood who has been instrumental in recent years in encouraging the redress of the neglect of Boer War Monuments throughout the City of Port Phillip and

Lieutenant Colonel Ian George who is the Deputy Chairman of the Victorian Committee of the National Boer War Memorial Association.

The Victorian State Boer War Memorial is located on State Crown Land in a reserve known as the Albert Reserve on the South Western side of the St Kilda Road Domain Interchange. The Melbourne Metro Rail Authority Environmental Effects Statement envisages this Memorial being relocated in an inappropriate fashion to a position that will lessen its significance and which will detract from its cultural, aesthetic and historic value to the citizens of the State of Victoria.

This Memorial, which is known as the South African Soldiers Memorial, presently stands at one of the proposed entry portals to the new Domain underground railway station. The nomenclature of the monument is inherited from the South African Soldiers Association which was the driving force for its construction. That association was formed by the Australian veterans returning from the war in South Africa to provide an organisation where they could maintain contact with their Australian veteran mates and to remember their service and commemorate their fallen comrades in arms left behind in South Africa.

In order that the monument not impede the construction of the Melbourne Metro Rail Authority project in the Domain area, it must be moved. Our proposal is that rather than have the structure, stored off site for an indeterminate period (but for at least several years) and eventually re-erected in the same constricted area of the Albert Reserve, this important State memorial be re-established on a site within the Shrine of Remembrance Reserve where the remainder of the State’s military heritage is represented. It should be noted that the Shrine website carries the reminder that:

“The Shrine of Remembrance, located in Kings Domain on St Kilda Road, Melbourne, Australia was built as a memorial to the men and women of Victoria who served in World War I and is now a memorial to all Australians who have served in war.”

Ladies and gentlemen, it is difficult to appreciate the importance of this memorial without having some knowledge of the conflict that raged in South Africa from October 1899 to May 1902 and the part played in that conflict by the State of Victoria. These hostilities became known as the Anglo Boer War, the South African War or just the Boer War and took
place during the transition of the Australian colonies to federation as the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

The Boer States in South Africa invaded the British colonies of Natal and Cape Colony in 1899 and as the situation in South Africa was widely anticipated throughout the empire, the colonies in Australia were quick to offer military support to Great Britain. The harsh times being experienced here meant that there was no shortage of volunteers. Australians flocked to the recruiting booths and personnel quotas imposed by Britain were quickly filled. Many who missed out travelled to South Africa independently and enlisted in British units once there.

About 23,000 Australians including 6,000 Victorians fought in the Boer War and about 1,000 including some 200 Victorians gave their lives for what they saw as a worthy and righteous cause in defence of the Empire.

On their return to Australia in 1902 the veterans found conditions not largely changed from when they left. Drought was still the scourge of the new Australian nation and it wasn’t until 1911 that their veteran organisation the “South African Soldiers Association” was sufficiently confident to commence fundraising for a memorial to be erected in memory of their comrades who had fought and died those many years previously. All the funds for the memorial were collected by public subscription and it took another 12 years before their vision was realised and in 1924 the stone obelisk memorial was finally dedicated in the position where it now stands.

At the dedication ceremony, the then Mayor of South Melbourne on behalf of the people of Victoria and as custodians accepted responsibility for the care and maintenance of this fine monument. It could thus rightfully be said that the people of Victoria are the owners and the City of Port Philip (as the corporate descendants of the City of South Melbourne) the custodians (for care and maintenance) of the State Boer War Memorial.

The dedication ceremony predated the construction of the Shrine of Remembrance by some 9 years and the location of the South African Soldiers Memorial was then in a quiet, respectful and contemplative position where veterans, their surviving loved ones and the people of Victoria could gather to pay their respects and honour those who had fallen in the war.

That environment has long since been replaced with a busy vehicle and public transport boulevard which is soon to be even busier with the construction of the underground rail project and the new Domain rail station – a position no longer suited to meet the vision and expectations of our veteran forebears. There can be little doubt that if the Memorial were being built today; the preferred location would be on the 14 acre Shrine of Remembrance Reserve.

Long gone also is the possibility of the conduct of commemorative services at the memorial as the space restrictions of the Albert Reserve would make the assembly of more than a few people a hazardous and dangerous enterprise. Yet the City of Port Phillip whose municipal land abuts the Crown Land of the Albert Reserve have suggested pursuant to the Conservation Management Plan that the Council have recently accepted, that the monument be dismantled, stored for a number of years then re-erected on the municipal land adjacent to the Domain station entry portal when completed.
This proposal is rejected by the National Boer War Memorial Association as being totally inappropriate and indeed disrespectful to our veteran forebears who worked so hard to establish a fitting memorial that would stand in perpetuity as a symbol of the gratitude of the people of Victoria to their heroic service and to the memory of their departed comrades.

The Monument, which has a footprint of some 20 metres square, must be properly oriented particularly on its principal approach, with sufficient surrounding space and these requirements cannot be achieved adjacent to the station entry portal of at least 7 metres square even with the proposed slight enlargement to the Albert Reserve

The Environment Effects Statement prepared by the Melbourne Metro Rail Authority states inter alia and I quote:

“the (South African Soldiers) Memorial is significant for historical, social and aesthetic reasons. It is an important Victorian war memorial and is strongly associated with the Boer War and the rise in nationalism and patriotism in the early twentieth century. Following construction (of the Domain Rail Station) the memorial is proposed to be reinstated on the site but in a different location, altering the presentation of the memorial and potentially reducing its prominence.

The focus in detailed design should be on achieving a siting that allows sufficient space around the monument for it to retain a level of prominence consistent with both its design and its commemorative purpose”.

Further, under consideration of the Concept Design it is stated:

“While the co-location of the station entry with the South African Soldiers memorial presents a more significant challenge in terms of establishment of an appropriate setting for the memorial if located on this site, an improved outcome may be achieved through reconfiguration and enlargement of the reserve to accommodate the relocated memorial.”

The Burra Charter reminds us that memorials of this nature represent a substitute grave site for those who fell and remain buried in foreign lands and as such is of significant cultural value to the Victorian community. In keeping with the Charter heritage concepts, the EES explains that a change in location of the memorial on the present site (rather than an alternative site) would alter the presentation of the Memorial and if sited away from the St Kilda Road frontage of the site would reduce its prominence. What is important is that the memorial is orientated appropriately and sufficient space is provided around, particularly on its principal approach at which commemoration services can be held.

The Port Phillip Conservation Management Plan expresses the desire (reflecting the wishes of the surrounding residents through their Body Corporates) that the monument remain in the Albert Reserve.

The reserve encompasses two roughly equilateral triangular areas, one delineated as Municipal land and the other larger area upon which the monument stands delineates State Crown Land. The area of these two triangles contains a vegetated reserve also roughly triangular in shape described as “ornamental plantation”. Each side of this reserve is approximately 100 meters in length and contains a couple of what appear to be unused and
non operating electric brick barbeques, a drinking fountain (also non operating), a couple of park benches and a number of mature and semi mature trees.

It is surrounded by short term kerbside parking bays on two sides and the very busy up lane thoroughfare of St Kilda Road. We submit that this is a highly inappropriate environment for such an important Victorian military monument – particularly when it is within view of the Shrine of Remembrance Reserve where the heritage if Victoria’s military history is respectfully assembled – an assembly now missing the State memorial to those Victorian citizens who fought in the first conflict to which our nation committed armed forces.

This desire of the Council to have the monument retained on the Albert Reserve is understandable as the residents who they represent have significant standing in the community. However, it is contended that there is here a higher purpose to serve. The citizens including many veterans who financed the monument did so in the earnest belief that it would stand in perpetuity as a memorial to those Victorians who gave of themselves to a cause they believed in and that it would forever provide a quiet and solemn place where their sacrifice could be remembered in undisturbed contemplation. We cannot, we must not deny our obligation to respect and preserve the vision of our forebears by allowing the memorial to become yet another municipal artefact, seen by the numerous passersby each day yet understood and revered by the very few who appreciate its significance.

Its proper place is with the other memorials of our states Military heritage where residents and the increasing number of international visitors attend to learn and remember our proud military history.

The Memorial is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register and we recognise that the ultimate decision as to the final site for the monument is in the hands of Heritage Victoria.

The Trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance have indicated that a request from the City Of Port Phillip to have the memorial finally located in the Shrine precinct would receive their consideration.

Our forebears who worked so hard to have their brethren in arms commemorated in a way that would ensure that their memory is respected in perpetuity must not be ignored. It was obviously their intent that the memorial stand in a prominent yet contemplative place, where those who would come after them could quietly and respectfully remember their deeds and honour their sacrifice they made in our name.

The opportunity to have this memorial erected in the hallowed grounds of the Shrine of Remembrance Reserve in a position in keeping with the vision of those Australian soldiers and nurses who served in South Africa is unique and must not be wasted.

The position of the National Boer War Memorial Association in this matter is supported by many ex service, military and historic associations. Some of these include:

Returned and Services League sub-branches at:
Box Hill, Waverley, Caulfield
Military History and Heritage Victoria
Royal United Services Institute of Victoria
The National Boer War Memorial Association
The Defence Reserves Association
The 58th/32nd Battalion Association

and individuals including:
Air Vice Marshal (Retd) Alan Reed, AO
Major General M.P.J O’Brien, CSC
Major General K Cooke, AO,RFD,ED
Colonel Marcus Fielding
Mr J Smorgan, AO
Colonel John Haynes  OAM

The matters raised in our submission have also been represented to:
The Trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance
The Council of the City of Port Phillip
Heritage Victoria
Ministers and Departments of the Government of Victoria
The Melbourne Metro Rail Authority.

It is our contention that this Memorial is not a municipal or local monument. It is the Victorian State Boer War Memorial and, as it stands on State Crown Land, its destiny is in the hands of the State of Victoria. It represents an important event in our states military heritage that deserves our respect and should not be relegated to become a kerb-side relic overshadowed by high rise development.

We submit that to leave this tangible reminder of our heritage in a tiny patch of vegetation where it will increasingly become eventually hidden amongst multi story buildings and crowds of foot and transport commuter traffic would be an abrogation of our responsibilities and would forever be regretted as uncaring by future generations.

It belongs in the Shrine of Remembrance Reserve where it would be properly cared for and respected by the many local and international visitors who rightfully expect that what they witness during their time at the Shrine is a complete representation of the military heritage of the State of Victoria.

Thank You
3 February 2016

Mr Ian D George
Deputy Chairman
Boer War Memorial Association Committee Victoria
PO Box 2006
BLACKBURN SOUTH Victoria 3130

Dear LTCOL George

Re: Victorian State Boer War Memorial

Thank you for your letter dated 20 January 2016 providing further explanation of the National Boer War Memorial Association's concerns relating to the relocation of the "Victorian State Boer War Memorial."

Your correspondence will be shared with Trustees, however, consideration of the memorial's relocation to the Shrine of Remembrance reserve is contingent upon the memorial's owner advising us it is their wish to do so. No such advice has been received.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

Dean M Lee
Chief Executive Officer