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MEDIA RELEASE

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TOUGHER PENALTIES NEEDED FOR WAR MEMORIALS AND OTHER PROTECTED PLACES

Today, the Summary Offences Amendment (War Memorials and Other Protected Places) Bill 2024 will resume in NSW Parliament for its Second Reading Debate.

The proposed amendments to the Summary Offences Act 1998 come in response to a disturbing increase in vandalism incidents, including attacks on the Pool of Reflection at the Hyde Park War Memorial and the more recent attack at Fairfield RSL War Memorial where seven brass war memorial plaques, with the names of 192 Veterans who served during World War I, were stolen.

This Bill seeks to enhance the legal protections for war memorials statewide. Specifically, it ensures that anyone who vandalises the Pool of Reflection at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park will face criminal prosecution under strengthened laws. This Bill broadens the definition of a war memorial to encompass all shrines, monuments, statues and similar structures, as well as clarifying associated features such as gardens and pools.

The proposed legislation increases the maximum penalties for wilfully damaging or defacing a war memorial to 50 penalty units (\$5,500) or 2 years imprisonment, or both. This marks an important increase from the current maximum penalty of 40 penalty units (\$4,400).

Shadow Minister for Veterans Robyn Preston said our war memorials stand as enduring tributes to the brave men and women who sacrificed so much for the freedoms we cherish today.

“There is no place in our society for those who seek to deface or desecrate these sacred sites. By introducing tougher penalties, we are sending a clear message that NSW will not tolerate any disrespect towards our history or those who fought for it.”

“The last time this legislation looked to increase penalties for the damage and desecration of war memorials and other protected places was in 2007. This has not worked to deter such disrespectful acts. Offences have continued to increase since 2007.

Penalties must be tougher and definitions clarified for summary offences of war memorials and other protected places. It should not have to be left up to a judge and jury for an indictable offence, under the Crimes Act 1900, to decide whether signs of respect are owed to the people who fought for the freedoms we have today,” Ms Preston said.

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