

media release

ANIMALS HONOURED THROUGH NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL

The role of animals throughout Australia's wartime history will be honoured this morning with the unveiling of Australia's first National Memorial to Animals in War.

The Memorial will be unveiled by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Alan Griffin MP, in the Sculpture Garden of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Minister Griffin said the Memorial recognised that animals had performed important jobs for Australian forces overseas.

"Australia's servicemen and women still rely on animals today. For example, explosive detection dogs are working in Afghanistan to help protect people and places. These are dangerous jobs that without a doubt are saving human lives."

Created by artist Steven Holland, the Memorial's main feature is a large bronze horse head, an Australian War Memorial collection item, and the only remaining fragment from the original Desert Mounted Corps memorial, destroyed during the Suez Crisis of 1956.

The RSPCA's National President, Lynne Bradshaw, said the Memorial acknowledged the significant contribution animals have made during times of conflict.

"Pigeons carried urgent messages between the trenches and military headquarters; camels, donkeys and horses provided vital transport for people and equipment; dogs worked as messengers, trackers and guards; and cats patrolled navy ships for mice, rats and other pests," Mrs Bradshaw said.

"Animals not only served man but provided companionship and comfort and their very presence in the darkest of times was treasured by the people they stood beside.

"This memorial pays tribute to this relationship but also aims to educate the Australian community about the value of animal life. Their service was as perilous as it was varied and like the people they served, many thousands of animals never returned home.

"The RSPCA believes the Memorial to Animals in War cements in stone the significance of animals in our society and pays homage to a bond between man and beast that no war could fracture."