

LESLIE THOMAS STARCEVICH — GRAVE AND MEMORIAL PROTECTION

Statement by Minister for Culture and the Arts

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Culture and the Arts) [9.08 am]: I rise to inform the house that on Saturday, 21 April, I was privileged to be in Esperance in the presence of the family members of the late Leslie Thomas “Tom” Starcevich, VC, to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Shire of Esperance to protect the grave and memorial of Mr Starcevich. This follows the earlier signing of a similar MOU with the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, fulfilling the McGowan government’s pledge to protect the graves and memorials of WA’s Victoria Cross recipients who are commemorated at Esperance, Fremantle and Karrakatta Cemeteries. This adds a greater level of certainty, ensuring their protection and retention in perpetuity.

The Victoria Cross is the highest military decoration awarded for valour to members of the Australian Defence Force. It is awarded to a person who, in the presence of the enemy, displays the most conspicuous gallantry, daring, pre-eminent act of valour, self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty. Tom Starcevich was awarded the Victoria Cross during the Borneo campaign of the Second World War for single-handedly capturing four Japanese machine gun positions on 28 June 1945. Complete disregard for his own safety played a significant part in the success of his decisive action. It is crucial that we physically preserve the memorials of those Western Australians who acted so honourably in the face of such tremendous adversity.

Tom Starcevich, VC, is one of nine Victoria Cross recipients buried in Western Australian cemeteries. The names of the other heroic Western Australians are Thomas Leslie Axford, John Carroll, Martin O’Meara, Hugo Vivian Hope Throssell, James Park Woods, Hughie Idwal Edwards, James Heather Gordon and Leonard Henry Trent. Each recipient has his own story of gallantry and honour. By preserving these war graves and memorials, we demonstrate our collective respect for the contributions, sacrifice and heroic achievements of VC recipients, and we also help to ensure that their individual stories are shared with the community for generations to come.

This announcement coincides with the 103rd anniversary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli in World War I. The McGowan Labor government understands the significance of the Victoria Cross and recognises that the great achievements of those recipients warrants protection and retention in perpetuity.

Lest we forget.