

**AUSTRALIAN SUBMARINE SERVICE CENTENARY — HMAS *AE1* COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE**

*Statement by Minister for Veterans*

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Veterans)** [12.10 pm]: This year marks the centenary of the Australian submarine service. It is also the 100th anniversary of the loss of Australia's first submarine, *AE1*. On Sunday, 14 September I attended a commemorative service at Fleet West Base—HMAS *Stirling*—to remember the 35 crew of *AE1*. Similar services were conducted in Sydney and Rabaul.

In August 1914, *AE1* was assigned to the hastily assembled Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force dispatched to take control of wireless stations in the German protectorate of New Guinea. It took part in the operations leading to the occupation of the German territory, including the surrender of Rabaul on 13 September 1914. The following day, 14 September, *AE1*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Thomas Besant, headed from the Duke of York Islands to Rabaul for repairs and resupply. It was last sighted by crew on the HMAS *Parramatta* at about 3.20 pm that day. Seas were calm and visibility was good. En route she vanished and was never seen again. A century on, the cause of *AE1*'s disappearance and her location remains an enduring naval mystery. The *AE1*'s disappearance was Australia's first major loss of the Great War.

In 1914 submarines were still in their pioneering stage in both technology and reliability. The dangers and risk to crew were great and constant. Over the past couple of decades several searches have been carried out to locate the wreck of *AE1*, most notably in 2003 and 2007. In the past week the Royal Australian Navy mine hunter, HMAS *Yarra*, has been conducting an underwater search for the wreck. The oldest mystery of the Australian navy may soon be solved. Like the discovery of HMAS *Sydney II* in 2008, locating the final resting place of *AE1* will bring closure to the relatives of her crew and the nation. We are reminded of the words from the 1914 poem *Missing* by Will Lawson —

Wrapped in the ocean boundless  
Where the tides are scarcely stirred  
In deeps that are still and boundless,  
They perished unseen, unheard.

Lest we forget.