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Speaker	Filing Mr P.A. (MOORE, LP, Opposition)	Interjector	Mr Taylor
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Mr FILING (Moore) (2.16 p.m.) —I move:

That this House calls on the Government to:

- (1)consider supporting any move to locate the sunken vessel *HMAS Sydney*;
- (2)accept that, regardless of the outcome, surviving family members of those who lost their lives on *HMAS Sydney* are owed consideration of a full-scale public search for the vessel;
- (3)support public efforts to raise money to assist in locating the wreck;
- (4)fund and coordinate a suitable commemorative service for those who lost their lives on *HMAS Sydney* should the vessel be located;
- (5)erect a suitable memorial in Canberra to commemorate the loss of *HMAS Sydney* in accordance with the wishes of surviving family members;
- (6)ensure the exact coordinates of the sunken *HMAS Sydney* are not disclosed to the general public;
- (7)establish an Act of Parliament which protects the wreck from being dived upon other than for purposes of official identification and provide substantial penalties for transgressions of the Act; and
- (8)once the Act is established, embark on an extensive advertising campaign to make the public aware that diving on *HMAS Sydney* is a criminal offence and the penalties applicable.

I have moved this motion because I believe that the sailors who lost their lives in the tragic sinking of the *HMAS Sydney* during World War II, and their families, are owed a concerted search to find the final resting place of this vessel. In proposing this motion, which calls for a commitment by the government, I am conscious that there are several opposing schools of thought about both what happened to cause the *HMAS Sydney* to sink in 1941 and how the government conducted subsequent investigations into the circumstances of the sinking.

There have been suggestions by some people that there has been a concerted conspiracy to cover up the true circumstances of the sinking. Others feel the whereabouts of the vessel should remain a secret forever. With this in mind, the motion before us aims to give Commonwealth support to community efforts to find the sunken *HMAS Sydney* and also to conduct appropriate commemorations to ensure that the tragedy of the sinking is never lost from the memory of the Australian people.

In recent years there have been increased calls for a search for the *HMAS Sydney*. Some groups, such as the *HMAS Sydney* Foundation Trust, which has been set up by a constituent of mine, Mr Wayne Born of Merriwa, have put in enormous amounts of time and effort searching for the possible whereabouts of the shipwreck of the *HMAS Sydney*. Mr Born has held a number of meetings and has contacted members of parliament from both sides of the House and the Senate, and of state parliaments, in an effort to call for a



commitment for a thorough search for the remains of the HMAS *Sydney*.

Today's motion is a follow-up on the efforts of Mr Born, his committee and others. I must say at the outset that the assistance of the HMAS *Sydney* Association will be very helpful to any further undertakings to find the whereabouts of the ship.

In explanation, in the short time available I would like to background the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Sydney* as we know them now. This year is the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. But, four years before the war ended, the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* was involved in a bitter engagement with the German raider *Kormoran*. The engagement occurred on 19 November 1941. As I have indicated, there are varying reports about what actually happened on that fateful day. We are told that just before 4 p.m. on that day the *Sydney* was spotted by the German cruiser *Kormoran*. The *Kormoran* tried to outrun the Australian ship, but a broken piston rod made this impossible. The *Sydney* moved to intercept the German vessel and flashed a signal to the ship for it to show its letters as they approached on a convergent course. The *Kormoran*, with its guns hidden, masqueraded as an innocent merchant ship for as long as possible. She flashed her call sign as that of a Dutch freighter, the *Straat Malakka*, as the *Sydney* closed the gap between the two vessels. Once the ships were parallel and fairly close to each other, about 1,500 metres apart, the *Sydney* flashed the order 'Show your secret sign'. It was then that the *Kormoran* hoisted the German ensign and opened fire on the *Sydney*.

Two ranging shots pitched short and over respectively, but then a full salvo hit, smashing into the bridge structure and direct tower of the *Sydney*. The *Kormoran* then fired two torpedos and her anti-aircraft guns amidships. The *Sydney* replied with a salvo from her six-inch guns which tore over the *Kormoran*. More fire from the *Kormoran* knocked out the forward turrets of the *Sydney*, hitting the on-board aircraft and bringing aviation fuel over the deck. The firing continued back and forth until both ships were ablaze and wrecked.

The *Sydney* was last seen about 10 miles from the sinking *Kormoran* just before 10.00 p.m. She was well ablaze and limping into the night. None of the 645 officers and men survived this encounter. Of the crew of the *Kormoran*, 78 died and the remainder of her 393 crew were eventually captured and imprisoned in Australia and later repatriated.

The sinking of the *Sydney* remains Australia's worst naval tragedy to this day. Relatives of the dead servicemen still wonder where their loved ones are buried at sea. Before the fateful *Kormoran* battle, the *Sydney* had been no stranger to combat. In fact, she had taken continued attack from the air as well as having her share of battle successes. On 26 June 1941, for instance, the *Sydney* engaged the 1,073 tonne *Espero* in the eastern Mediterranean and sank the ship, scoring a devastating broadside and eventually finishing off the ship and taking on board a large number of Italian survivors. Michael Montgomery, in his book *Who sank the Sydney?*, wrote:

During the next week the *Sydney* was continuously attacked from the air, enduring no less than twenty-five raids in the space of a single day and exhausting her entire stock of anti-aircraft ammunition.

There followed a chequered and busy involvement of the *Sydney* in the Mediterranean and then later in the Indian Ocean. It is fair to say that the HMAS *Sydney* saw a great deal of action. The men aboard her must have run the entire gamut of emotions during this time—from fear and anger to elation and regret. They were brave Australians who made a magnificent contribution to the war effort. Australians everywhere should be reminded of their efforts.

What happened on the day the *Sydney* met her fate has been the subject of many books and articles. It has been the subject of inquiries and yet, even after all that, much of what has happened is still largely a mystery. There are stories, for example, that the Australian sailors were fired upon in the water by the Germans aboard the *Kormoran*. If this were true, it would constitute a war crime of the gravest order. Likewise, there have been persistent rumours—outlined in Montgomery's *Who sank the Sydney?* and largely debunked in other works, including *HMAS Sydney: loss and controversy* by Tom Frame—that a Japanese midget submarine was involved in the sinking. The point about these views is that, in the absence of the remains of the vessels, they do remain speculative. Many of the events surrounding the sinking have been put together from the memories of surviving German mariners and from conjecture connected with the discovery of some insubstantial flotsam from the HMAS *Sydney*.

In any reasonable examination, it would appear that these resources are simply not sufficient to once and for all detail exactly what happened on that day in November off the

Western Australian coast. If the *HMAS Sydney* were found, many of these nagging questions which have survived the years could be proved or put to rest. If she were found there could be, for the relatives of those who died, some relief in finally knowing what happened and where their loved ones died. If the ship is never found, the relatives deserve the consideration of a full-scale search. At least they are owed a commitment that we did everything in our power to find the ship.

Of course, regardless of the outcome of the search—and remember we are asking for a commitment of support in principle—we believe there should be some permanent memorial to the 645 officers and sailors who died that day. It would be appropriate in this year of Australia Remembers, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War, to erect a suitable memorial here in Canberra to the crew of the *HMAS Sydney*. If the vessel remains lost, this would at least be a focal point for the grief of the families of these men. If a publicly funded and government supported search for the *Sydney* were successful in finding the ship's remains, the question then becomes: what do we do then?

This motion proposes two courses of action. Firstly, the government should arrange and coordinate a suitable memorial service for the men who died. This may be held at sea over the spot where the *Sydney* now lies or it may be held on land at a suitable landfall adjacent to the location. Alternatively, it could be held in Canberra—perhaps at the *HMAS Sydney* memorial, if constructed by then. Whichever commemoration is chosen, the service should be a fitting tribute to the bravery and courage of those who served aboard the ship. It should, obviously, be attended by the close family of those who died in the service of their nation.

Secondly, the government should ensure, without resorting to additional secrecy, that the sunken remains of the *HMAS Sydney* are protected from vandalism and souvenir hunting in some way. How this can be achieved is, obviously, going to be a matter for the Department of Defence and others. However, the important thing is that, having found the final resting place of the *Sydney*—in effect its grave site—the remains should be protected from casual diving and the associated deterioration of the site which may result.

As I have said previously, regardless of the outcome of any proposed search for the *HMAS Sydney*, we owe the relatives of the officers and the crew who served aboard her in her last hours the courtesy of a full-scale search. They deserve our best efforts to trace the vessel so that we can at last unravel Australia's biggest maritime mystery once and for all. It is, therefore, the intention of this motion to ensure that the relatives are given the consideration of knowing that the government will support a concerted search for the vessel. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Newell)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Taylor—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

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