



Suggestion 34

Ms Meg Renfrey

3 pages

Submission to the Australian Electoral Commission

An individual submission for Changing the Name of the McMillan Electorate. November 2017

I am affiliated with the Bass Coast and South Gippsland Reconciliation Group and wish to additionally submit my own support for changing the name of the McMillan Electorate, to a name that is chosen by the Traditional Custodians, the GunnaiKurnai People.

I wish to state that I strongly object to the name of Angus McMillan, who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Aboriginal people in the 1840s through many mass killings. These murders occurred at Nuntin, Boney Point, Butchers Creek, Maffra, Skull Creek, Bruthen Creek, Warrigal Creek, Murindal, Brodribb River, and other areas in South, Central, and East Gippsland. These occurred from 1840 to approximately 1850. There is evidence of McMillan's direct involvement in many of these killings (for example with his "Highland Brigade") and he would have certainly known about all of them. Later, when in charge of distributing supplies to missions at Lake Tyres and Ramahyuk, it is said he dealt with this corruptly, withholding supplies for himself. ^{i. ii}

Apart from all the terrible mass killings, opening up pastoral land was easy to some extent because Aboriginal people had already been managing the environment for many thousands of years with their sophisticated knowledge of the seasons, fire stick farming, cold burns, cultivation and storage of food and other agricultural practices. ⁱⁱⁱ

Angus McMillan was certainly not the benevolent 'discoverer' and 'founding father' of Gippsland. In fact, his activities represent and are typical of the understorey of white Australian history in which the opening up of pastoral land was predicated upon the gratuitous and cold-blooded murder of Aboriginal men, women and children.

I am personally acquainted with some of the descendents of the few escapees from these massacres. Dispossession of the GunnaiKurnai people led to a broken diaspora and segregation practices in which Aboriginal people's lives were strictly controlled. Movement was curtailed, cultural denial enforced and soon regulations involving "half castes" and full bloods saw many letters of anguish (documented) pleading for contact with family members. For example, I know of such a letter written from Lake Tyres by a grandfather, begging for return of his grandchildren following the death of his daughter. ^{iv} A family history of trauma was the legacy given to subsequent generations and has shown up in institutionalisations and poor health in my friends' lives to this day.

Discrimination has both direct and indirect effects on health outcomes and is an increasing focus for epidemiological and public health research. ^v Individual experiences of direct discrimination contribute to mental and physical health problems and the long history of social and institutional discrimination has caused intergenerational trauma among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.^{vi}

It is distressing for Gunaikurnai People to have the McMillan name as a constant reminder of the murders committed and only adds to a sense of alienation and marginalisation. We should not impose the name of McMillan on the descendents of his victims. Indeed it is much better for the whole community to acknowledge the truth and understand that our lives today rest upon these origins.

There has been a groundswell of support for this name change. Submissions were made in 2002 and this electorate written about.^{vii} I believe the current Federal Member for McMillan, The Hon Russell Broadbent, is also in favour of changing the name. Disturbing names of other places may also be changed, as for example, in Queensland.^{viii}

Importantly, it is only right that the Aboriginal Communities of Gippsland have a voice in choice of the new name. I would strongly support advocacy that they be consulted on a new name for this electorate.

At this point I can only underscore what has been written in the Bass Coast South Gippsland Reconciliation Group submission:

We have recently found a path to common ground, through the leadership of key Aboriginal organisations forming a broadly representative Naming Committee. The Gunaikurnai Naming Committee is currently being established and, following proper consultation processes, will be recommending a name for this electorate in due course, when further comment is invited.

The Reconciliation Group cannot recommend strongly enough to the AEC's McMillan Redistribution Committee that the Aboriginal choice of name should succeed and become the new electoral name. We believe that there can be no argument greater than that those who were dispossessed by the colonising of Gippsland and the massacres that took so many lives, should have their descendants given naming rights. The Gippsland Aboriginal Community has been substantially disenfranchised and the awarding of the name to their choice would be a very important statement of good faith, an act of reconciliation and public recognition and valuing of the prior occupation of Aboriginal people in Gippsland for over 30,000 years.

Yours faithfully,

Ms Meg Renfrey.




References

- ⁱ Gardner, P.D, (1990) ***Our Founding Murdering Father*** Ngarak Press Essay
- ⁱⁱ Please see the Bass Coast South Gippsland Reconciliation Group submission for more details. No need to duplicate here.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Gammage, B, (2011) ***The Greatest Estate on Earth: how Aborigines made Australia*** Allen and Unwin Crow's Nest NSW, and Pascoe, B, (2014) ***Dark Emu, Black Seeds: agriculture or accident?*** Magabala Books Broome.
- ^{iv} ***Honouring Mother – The Nellie Darby Story***, ABC RN Hindsight program produced by Jan Wositzky, 26 Sept. 2004.
- ^v See Paradies, Yin (2006) ***A systematic review of empirical research on self-reported racism and health***. International Journal of Epidemiology (35) pp 888-901. And Paradies, Yin, and Cunningham, Joan,(2012) ***The DRUID Study: racism and self-assessed healthstatus in an indigenous population*** BMC Public Health, Bio Medical central (Open access).
- ^{vi} Atkinson, J; et al (2010) ***Trauma, Transgenerational Transfer and Effects on Community Wellbeing***. Chapter 10 IN Purdie et al, ***Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental health and Wellbeing principles and Practice***. Australian Government department of Health and Ageing, Australian Council for Educational Research, Kulunga Research Network, Telethon Institute for Child Health, Canberra, ACT.
- ^{vii} Andrew Rule ***The black watch, and a verdict of history***. April 27, 2002. theage.com.au_files/AGE.htm
- ^{viii} See '***A blot on the landscape': Queensland calls time on racist place names*** - Move to wipe offensive names from the map comes as the history wars reignite over monuments and Australia Day. Joshua Robertson, @jrojourno, Wednesday 30th August 2017. <https://amp.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/aug/30/a-blot-on-the-landscape-queensland-calls-time-on-racist-place-names>