



Suggestion 1

Geoff Ellis

5 pages

In respect of the division currently known as McMillan:

In respect of the division currently known as McMillan I submit that there are several very strong reasons to remove that name and replace it with one selected through the AEC consultative process.

In consideration of the AEC guidelines for naming a division I submit that:

- * McMillan is not a Federation seat.
- * McMillan was not a Prime Minister.
- * The name is not of Aboriginal origin.
- * McMillan is not a deceased Australian who rendered outstanding service to his country.

McMillan was one of thirteen seats added to the twenty existing Victorian federal electorates in 1948.

In the later decades of the 19th century Angus McMillan was recognised as a founding father of Gippsland. During the first decades of the 20th Century he was celebrated with regular pilgrimages to his grave where school children sang songs about him. Paintings, books and Newspaper articles idealized his achievements.

The apex of this veneration was the erection of a series of cairns across Gippsland that memorialized the explorations of McMillan (and Strzelecki). These memorials were organised by a Melbourne based Committee. They were all unveiled by the Governor (Lord Sommers) in April 1927.

At these unveilings the Governor lauded McMillan as the link between Britain and modern Australia, using words to the effect that he had “won” the country for the generations that would follow and make Australia great. It can be argued that this was effectively erasing the Aboriginal presence from the landscape and replacing it with European iconography.

It is easy to see that when the Distribution Committee travelled through the towns and villages of Gippsland in the 1940s they would have encountered this cult of personality through the brooding presence of the cairns and in conversations with people, raised in their shadow, well-schooled in the “heroic” nature of white settlement.

Although the specifics relating to selection of the name McMillan are lost to us, most of the other dozen new seats were named after explorers or early Governors. The final decisions were made by Federal Parliament and the debate is readily available in Hansard.

McMillan was suggested by the Distribution Committee and accepted without discussion by Parliament. Other recommended names were usurped by Parliament; for instance Lonsdale was replaced by Chisholm for reasons espoused by Arthur Calwell.

Calwell is often remembered for his much later joke that 'two Wongs don't make a White' which was received with great mirth amongst his colleagues of the time, many of whom had voted for the divisional names in 1948.

I have uncovered one letter to a local paper of that time that stated that Strzelecki was a more appropriate name for the Electorate. This argument is valid in relation to the current McMillan boundary. McMillan travelled less of the electorate that wears the blood stained stamp of his name than did Strzelecki.

I believe that the drive to name seats after explorers was a further attempt perpetuate the mythology of the early days of settlement that consigned the first people to the margins of history and was consequently emblematic of terra nullius.

Burke is another name from that post war batch that has been removed, though it was reinstated. Calwell supported the name as "Burke was an Irishman".

I therefore suggest that in 1948 there was a strong emotional and strategic imperative to honour Angus McMillan as some one who had cleared the land for settlement.

The distribution process was, generally, much less consultative than today and, as Parliament made the ultimate decision, the naming process was open to taint from the foibles of politicians.

Until the 1970s there was little reason to test the reasoning behind selection of that name. For instance, Angus McMillan's 1967 Australian Dictionary of

Biography entry is confined to his explorations and the introduction of cattle to the area.

In later years doubts surfaced about the nature of this clearing and settlement. The work of Peter Gardner culminated in a book entitled "Our Founding Murdering Father." The bare facts of the matter are:

- There were at least 2000 GunaiKurnai living in what is now Gippsland before McMillan led parties into the area. Some estimates are as high as 3000.
- In 1845 the NINETY SIX survivors were rounded up and, in an attempted final solution, were placed in missionary detention.

A contemporary report of these matters was read to a 2016 meeting of Bass Coast Shire Council as preamble to a motion that was passed supporting the removal of the name at the 2017 AEC redistribution. A similar motion was passed by South Gippsland Shire.

This contemporary excerpt shows that these actions were well beyond the bounds of decency, even by the brutal standards of the day.

"The blacks are very quiet here now, poor wretches. No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perseverance as they are. Men, women and children are shot whenever they can be met with ... I have protested against it at every station I have been in Gippsland, in the strongest language, but these things are kept very secret as the penalty would certainly be hanging ... They [the Aborigines] will very shortly be extinct. It is impossible to say how many have been shot, but I am convinced that not less than 450 have been murdered altogether."

Henry Meyrick, 'Life in the Bush'

Meyrick went on to say that he would have no hesitation shooting Aboriginals if they were stealing his cattle but found the murder of innocents unacceptable.

I trust that no other Australian Electorate honours a murderer, let alone an architect of slaughter. This man is accountable for several massacres of men, women and children. He and his cronies kept their deeds secret or disguised them as a search for one mythical white woman. They knew full well that their actions merited hanging.

Sticks and stones, broken bones and gunshots. The Highland Brigade kept their shameful bond to the grave. McMillan was the leader of these men; where he didn't pull the trigger he gave the order. As stated by Meryck, there are 450 reasons that constitute a strong argument to rename this division. Those lives were only recently written into our history. Angus McMillan needs to be despatched from the Division and another name chosen through the AEC redistribution process.

In summary I offer four very strong reasons to remove the name of McMillan from the Federal Electorate:

1/ the merit of the original naming process is highly questionable through bias and lack of consultation.

2/ the true nature of the clearing of Gippsland has only become general knowledge in the last few decades. The treatment directed by McMillan toward Aborigines is beyond redemption and does not warrant honouring of any individual perpetrator or conspirator through the naming of an electorate.

3/ McMillan is not a deceased Australian who rendered outstanding service to his country.

4/ retention of the name would be tacit continuance of Terra Nullius.

McMillan? Not in his name, please.

Geoff Ellis

Western Port Ward Councillor
Bass Coast Shire Council



