



Suggestion 30

Cr Don Hill, Cr Andrew McEwen, Cr Jeremy Rich and
Cr Alyson Skinner

4 pages

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Victorian Redistribution suggestion uploaded from the AEC website.

Name: Ce Andrew McEwen

Organisation: Councillor

Address: [REDACTED]

Phone number:

Additional information: Cr Hill Skiner and Rich are also signatories to the submission

Submission to the AEC regarding the McMillan electorate name change 15 November 2017

As an act of practical reconciliation the electorate of McMillan name should be changed to reflect its indigenous history. An indigenous naming committee has been established of Gunnaikurnai organisations, with Bunurong involvement through the assistance of South Gippsland and Bass Coast Reconciliation Group. It is working collaboratively across tribal and clan groups to identify an appropriate name for the electorate. We believe that this group should suggest a new name in the spirit of practical reconciliation and healing.

Names can heal a fractured relationships and the unacknowledged bleak and dark past. New names are given at the birth of new life, as we must do eventually to bury and acknowledge the past. Despite the so called history wars of the late 20th century current historiography now estimates that between 120-180,000 people died in the frontier wars that we are still yet to acknowledge and memorialised.

Yet as a country we have yet to really have our own truth and reconciliation commission to allow for genuine release and forgiveness. To start this reconciliation and healing process must begin with banishing the demons and skeletons that we have in our collective sense of place. Angus McMillan will always be known as a person who opened up Gippsland, but the truth must also be told and the lies undone, un-memorialised.

Angus McMillan is part of these dark unacknowledged histories of our country. The Gunnaikurnai people resisted their dispossession as anyone would. But perversely, Angus McMillan has been memorialised and honoured. He was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Aboriginal people in the 1840s through a number of mass-scale killings. The victors write the history as Stalin did.

Extract on Wikipedia entry on the Gippsland massacres

“The [Aboriginal](#) people of [East Gippsland](#), [Victoria](#), [Australia](#), known as the [Gunai/Kurnai](#) people, fought against the European invasion of their land. The technical superiority of the Europeans' weapons gave the Europeans an absolute advantage. At least 300 people were killed, but other figures estimate up to 1,000; however, it is extremely difficult to be certain about the real death toll as so few records still exist or were even made at the time. Diseases introduced from the 1820s by European sealers and whalers also caused a rapid decline in Aboriginal numbers. The following list was compiled from such things as letters and diaries.^[1]

- 1840 - Nuntin- unknown number killed by [Angus McMillan](#)'s men
- 1840 - Boney Point - "[Angus McMillan](#) and his men took a heavy toll of Aboriginal lives"^[2]
- 1841 - Butchers Creek - 30-35 shot by [Angus McMillan](#)'s men^[2]
- 1841 - [Maffra](#) - unknown number shot by [Angus McMillan](#)'s men
- 1842 - [Skull Creek](#) - unknown number killed
- 1842 - [Bruthen Creek](#) - "hundreds killed"
- 1843 - [Warrigal Creek](#) - between 60 and 180 shot by [Angus McMillan](#) and his men
- 1844 - [Maffra](#) - unknown number killed

1846 - South [Gippsland](#) - 14 killed
1846 - [Snowy River](#) - 8 killed by Captain Dana and the [Aboriginal Police](#)
1846-47 - Central [Gippsland](#) - 50 or more shot by armed party hunting for [a white woman supposedly held by Aborigines](#); no such woman was ever found.
1850 - East [Gippsland](#) - 15-20 killed
1850 - [Murrindal](#) - 16 poisoned
1850 - [Brodribb River](#) - 15-20 killed

Gippsland [squatter](#) Henry Meyrick wrote in a letter home to his relatives in England in 1846:

The blacks are very quiet here now, poor wretches. No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparring 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 ... For myself, if I caught a black actually killing my sheep, I would shoot him with as little remorse as I would a wild dog, but no consideration on earth would induce me to ride into a camp and fire on them indiscriminately, as is the custom whenever the smoke is seen. 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.¹

What's in a name?

What's in a name? Places and names occupy an important part of people's psyche and sense of being. Identity in large measure for most people revolves around a sense of place. Names matter here as they give meaning and concretely identify places in people's minds.

It is an old adage that the victors write the history of people, areas and places. Cairns, memorials and names have eulogised Angus McMillan. To go forward hand in hand together requires an act of reconciliation. We can no longer tolerate a continuation of this '*stain on the wattle*'. We have to put an end to acknowledging a callous mass murderer and genuine terrorist from the Gunnaikurnai people's perspective. Just as we as a nation and people have reached the cultural maturity to condemn and demonise child abuse, domestic violence and the institutional stolen generations, we must show the same maturity and honesty to remove offensive names from our cultural landscapes that pollute our values.

The ultimate dispossession of the Gunnaikurnai people has had lasting effects to this day. The loss of land and country, the extermination of cultural practices, language and ceremonies that accompanied the massacres and dispossession represents a cultural genocide that has been continued through the naming of our electorate after a person who perpetrated what we would/could legally call genocide today. The name of McMillan perpetrates a continuation of the cultural post traumatic shock that our indigenous people continue to suffer from.

We should not honour nor impose the name of McMillan on the descendants of his victims. This is a continuation of cultural torture on our first people. Indigenous cultures were oral cultures with histories told as stories that remember their forebears, their leader and people. The reality is that stories of the massacres are told today and are raw in our indigenous fellow Australians consciousness.

The time for healing and genuine reconciliation is now! The renaming of the electorate is the start to the process of healing and maturity in to relationship between our indigenous first people and out fellow Australians in Gippsland.

It is only fair and reasonable that the Aboriginal Communities of Gippsland have a say in the new name and we recommend that they be consulted on a name. The Gunnaikurnai organisations have formed a naming committee, with Bunurong involvement. This outcome will not be known by 17/11/17 but can be submitted latter in the process

Cr Don Hill (South Gippsland Shire Council)

Cr Andrew McEwen (South Gippsland Shire Council)

Cr Jeremy Rich (South Gippsland Shire Council)

Cr Skinner (South Gippsland Shire Council)